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THE
EMIGRANT FAMILY.

VOL. III.



THE
EMIGRANT FAMILY;

OR,

The Story of an Australian Settler.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "SETTLERS AND CONVICTS."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

—
1849.

London:
Printed by STEWART and MURRAY,
Old Bailey.

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THE EMIGRANT FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

Willoughby's Return.—Katharine's Infancy.—"The Daisy" as Hostess.—The Bractons at Brisbane Water.—Reuben's Return.—Adieux.

THE gray-looking days of the July winter of Australia had set in, and the moderately-cold breezes of that season blew fresh and half tempestuous up from the South Seas, when the early risers of Sydney connected with mercantile affairs, whose first glance in the morning when they have hurried through the empty streets to a point of observation is ever towards the signal-post, discerned the signal for a homeward-bound whaler flying. On this occasion, however, the professional had been beforehand with the non-professional observers; and already a fine-looking Englishman, deep-tanned as a Mulatto, seated in the stern of his tight pilot boat, was far out from the shore, with a wild-looking crew

of half-naked New Zealanders pulling him gaily and hardily along the hills and hollows of the main, direct for the vessel. That day, about twelve o'clock, the *Harponier*, deep-laden, her hull almost buried in the water, was silently and heavily picking her way by the deepest channels to her anchorage.

Willoughby's first voyage had turned out a most auspicious one: "the fish," as the sailors said, "came to look after the ship. There was no need to keep a look-out for them." Everything that would hold a gallon of oil was full; and the vessel itself was crammed with almost more than it was safe to sail her with. However, the crew had been given to understand by the skipper that it was an old trick of his to leave nothing behind which he could carry away; and as they saw he could do with four hours below out of the twenty-four, and was n't afraid to put his own hand to a rope, they concluded it was best to have no grumbling: especially as it made good, after all, for their own "lays." And now, the ship coming into port, and all safe, every man was in rare good humour. The captain, in secret prospect of soon seeing the "Daisy of the Bay," being the happiest man aboard.

But Willoughby's pleasure did not long remain unimpaired. One of the partners of the firm told him, in the course of the afternoon, of the serious losses Lieutenant Bracton had had ; and further of his having heard that one of the young ladies had been for some time in very bad health. That same evening, after posting a letter to his family, Willoughby found one of his old acquaintances among the Broken Bay fleet just about to run down the harbour ; and by sunrise the next morning, he was at the cottage door at Brisbane Water. Mary had not expected him for two months to come : but it was one of those welcome disappointments which are so easily got over ; and, very probably, Mary had something else than the disappointment to think about just at the minute.

And now, as soon as Mary could become disengaged, she proceeded to inform Willoughby of all the changes that had taken place at the Morrumbidgee. Marianna and Mr. Hurley she thought must have had a quarrel, for poor Marianna was this long time ill, and she never heard anything now about Mr. Hurley. The overseer had turned out one of the greatest villains alive ; and Reuben had been the means of rescuing the ladies quite providentially from

the blacks : but all was now going on well ; only Katharine's last letter seemed so sad and desponding that she could n't make it out. She was in hopes Katharine and Reuben (but this to Willoughby only—no one else was ever to hear a syllable about it, he must mind that) would have taken a fancy to one another : “ but,” said Mary, “ this is the way people do about love, you see” (looking archly), “ always loving when they're not wanted, and thinking nothing of those who would make much of them. Well, perhaps, after all, Katharine is right : it is better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave. Why do you laugh ? Do you think I don't mean it ?” Of course there was but one answer that the young man *could* make.

But steadily as Willoughby had pursued his own business during the prosperous times of his family—seeming, indeed, almost to forget them in the new circle of affections he had entered—these tidings troubled him deeply ; and, explaining to the affectionate and considerate girl the unhappiness and anxiety he felt, he expressed a wish to see his relatives without delay. Mary entered into his feelings without any dash of selfish consideration ; and offered her horse, which

was running idle in the bush, to expedite his return to Sydney to take the mail: but she must make this bargain,—that he would try to get his family to come back with him and pay her a visit. To this Willoughby willingly consented, and by next evening he was again back on the borders of the capital. His temporary absence was easily arranged with his owners, as the vessel was not to begin to unload for a few days; and a rapid journey once more terminated in his arrival among the associates of his childhood.

The old gentleman was still the same solid substance as ever. At times he was evidently much depressed by the wavering health of his daughter; though generally he was cheerful out of doors, and had become quite a man of business. There was also a degree of uneasiness and anxiety sometimes discernible in his manner when Katharine fell under his notice; as if he thought something ailed her, yet could not discover sufficient indications to render him sure. Katharine was a great favourite: her father had died the death of a brave man, “in fierce Mahratta battle,” and his brother, then only a midshipman, had never forgotten him. When he had brought the orphan babe to his future

wife, and made his appeal in the infant's behalf, it was the cordial and touching tenderness with which the young lady (then living alone with her widowed mother) accepted the charge, that unalterably sealed his attachment to her. And for a long time, year after year, before they were married, the little Katharine was to them an object of mutual affection; filling them with a common delight, uniting them in a common duty, and linking their hearts together inseparably; till, as they sat together and looked down upon her as she slept, it would have startled them to have been suddenly reminded that she was not their own offspring.

His sister's indisposition did not move Willoughby so deeply as it had done at first; for he soon elicited the important fact that Mr. Hurley was, in all probability, still as much attached to her as ever; and that Marianna was only ill because she would be so. The young sailor's homely advice to her, was to "write her lover a letter of apology, and turn into her berth with a clear conscience." But this brought the discussion to a very abrupt termination. Mr. Willoughby Bracton was informed,—“That it was very well for him to assume to know all

about ropes, and spars, and blocks, and all the rest of the tackle aboard ship; but he might depend upon it that he was very incompetent to give a lady at all tolerable advice how to preserve the status of her sex from the thoughtless and wanton encroachments of his own." However, either the pleasure of her brother's visit, or the tenacity with which his advice clung to her mind, had a very beneficial influence on Miss Bracton's health; for, though she still continued querulous, and physically far from well, her manner became much more energetic and spirited, and like to what it formerly had been.

Mrs. Bracton was much as usual; and so also, to Willoughby, seemed Katharine: he could discern none of the melancholy Mary had inferred from her letter. She seemed rather more pallid, and had become more serious; but the change did not strike him as remarkable, considering her long and incessant attention to Marianna, and the gravity of the annoyance to which the family had been subjected in his absence. To Mary Kable's proposal the ladies offered no objections, beyond such as people are apt to make at first to a novelty which they

have really not taken into their consideration : at length it came to be merely a question whether Mary's invitation could be accepted without unbecoming intrusion upon her brother ; which Willoughby, who knew Reuben's simple habits and kind disposition, assured them need be no obstacle whatever. Punctilio, however, was not to be satisfied without further assurance ; and to settle the point, therefore, Willoughby rode over to Reuben's station, and saw him. The young Australian was too sincerely pleased with the family not to feel heartily gratified at the opportunity of thus assisting the recovery of Miss Bracton's health, promoting the enjoyment of his sister, manifesting his continued regard to his friend, and—if that must even be all—seeing Katharine once more. The arrangement, therefore, was at once concluded upon ; and, soon after Willoughby's return, carried into effect. The old gentleman himself remained at home, not inclining to leave the farm so soon after its reduction into a state of order ; and Willoughby drove his mother and sisters down to the capital.*

* Going to Sydney is always spoken of as going *down*, when the journey takes place from the interior,—as going *up*, when along the coast.

And now, if ever Willoughby had reason to feel proud of the choice he had made, this was the hour. Mary's face beamed out into a perfect radiance of beauty, such as he had never seen it wear before, as she welcomed her friends, and went on busily to minister to their comfort: indeed, it is the law of the beauty of the spirit, that it never shines forth in its full radiance till it has forgotten its own existence in the joy of blessing others. This fragrant wild flower, that had grown in solitude on the lonely margin of the bay, bade fair to rival, if not surpass, the more cultured sister and cousin of Willoughby: he saw with a bounding heart that Mrs. Bracton's gaze at times settled steadfastly upon the Australian maid, as if by an irresistible attraction.

It was a sunny afternoon when the visitors arrived. Everything was novel which their delighted hostess had to show to them. There was a circumstance, too, that Willoughby must have been a dullard if he could have failed to observe and dwell upon. In showing her visitors over the house and all around it, Mary evidently took pains, by referring to him, to show that Willoughby was as much at home there as

she was herself: that he was, in a certain sense, master there as she was mistress. Indeed, Mary did not even omit to intimate, that *if* she should *happen* ever to get married, Reuben meant to resign this farm to her entirely, and settle up the country, to be near his cattle.

Of such days, the evening soon comes. With perhaps a little headache from the unwonted excitement, Mary comfortably settled her friends in their apartments, and stole back to the parlour.

“You bring me everything, my Willoughby—first yourself, and last such a treat as this: and how many scores of presents in the mean time? And now tell me about this Sydney news,” she added, giving her hand in apologetic acknowledgment of not having listened with proper attention to some communication he had made at an earlier period of the day. “You know I could not attend properly to what you said whilst I was engaged with your mother and sisters:” for Mary seemed of late to take great pains to include Katharine in the same category with Marianna, emphatically calling both his sisters when speaking about them to Willoughby.

“Well, Mary, I don’t know that I can add

anything to what you already know. The owners, I imagine, like the state they find the ship and the hands in; and, of course, they're well pleased with such a cargo in such a short time. It would pass muster very well if I'd made a twelvemonth's voyage of it; so, as there'll soon be a share in the ship that they must either buy for the firm, or let it go into the hands of some other purchaser, they offer to secure it for me."

"And will you be able to buy it? I can help you, you know, when Reuben comes down the country; or we can send up to him and hasten him, if there's any need of it."

"No, darling; that's not necessary: the funds I have in the bank, along with my share in the oil, will do it; or nearly so. The difference, at all events, whatever oil is fetching, will be so little, that they'll make it right, on my bill, for the sum without demur."

"Well, that's all very nice. But now tell me about dear Katharine: you can't think how it frets me to see her so. What can it be? You see how different she is from what she was when I saw her first."

"There's nothing the matter with her, Polly, depend upon it: she's only fagged with waiting

on Marianna so long, and depressed by the shock of terror from those black wretches. Kate always takes a long time to come round: she lays anything of the sort so to heart. Marianna's nature instinctively endeavours to get rid of trouble by wildness and license; but poor Kate goes just the opposite way to work. She labours after a deeper patience; and thus she has both the original trouble and her own struggle with herself to sustain at once. That is as I imagine it to be: she is not only submitting, but trying to make herself submit, without a murmur."

"And very good of her, Willoughby?" said Mary inquiringly, looking up in his face; for she was no theologian: at least she had often to appeal to higher authority, lest she should be avowing that which was unorthodox.

"No; very silly," said Willoughby. "One thing at a time is quite enough. No man expects his horse to stand still when he's spurred."

"But what should she do then?"

"Why, receive the stroke from the hand above in all meekness: but, even more cheerfully still, pursue amended ways."

"Now, I must just tell you, Willoughby, that

you're wrong about Katharine : for that is just what she has said herself in her letter, and partly again to-day ; so that she cannot be doing as you say. It must be something else. Oh dear, I wish I could find it out !”

“ I tell you, there's nothing the matter with her. But you girls are always sentimental.”

“ Very well, Willoughby ; have your own way.”

“ And you'll have yours ?”

“ Yes.”

“ So you shall, in anything I can help you to secure it in. Mind you must get ready for Reuben in three or four days at the utmost.”

“ Ah, he always says he's coming before he does : he likes to have everything ready for him when he does come. He'll be here about this day week.”

The accommodations for visitors of the softer sex in such a cottage as that possessed by the Kables, though it had been rebuilt since their parents' death, were very limited. The young hostess was, therefore, necessitated to apportion her own and her brother's rooms between her visitors ; and, quartering herself upon Margaret, leave Willoughby and Reuben, on the return of

the latter, "to toss up for which should have the sofa and which the hearth-rug:" unless either of them chose to go into a room where there was another sofa but no fire.

Katharine seemed to have had allotted to her the plainest apartment in the house; but it was roomy, and fresh as if the pure air were seldom, by day or night, debarred of free ingress through the window: which still, as if by an oversight, stood open. Order reigned throughout its whole arrangements like a presiding spirit: on some hanging book-shelves there were a few books; and on the table, as if far more frequently resorted to than the rest, lay the solemn Legend of the Saints. Reuben's name was written in it in his own handwriting; broad, square, and plain as print itself.

Katharine knew Reuben's history pretty well; and had often wondered—never considering that our minds make us, not we them—how, with so little instruction, he had come to develope his powers into such a systematic and vigorous understanding. And now another problem arose—of what sect might he be in religion? In vain she resorted again to the shelves. That one great doctrinary which lay upon the table was all there

was to bear witness of his creed—"A Christian!" thought Katharine, "no more, and no less." And as her eyes wandered yet further round the room, the attestation presented itself that, if such were indeed Reuben's principle, it was no wild vaunt to escape from the shackles of any church, into license and speculation; for beneath the chair, by the couch side, there was a plain cushion, such as those might care to have who forget not morning and evening orison.

An unspeakable peace diffused itself through her heart. She felt that their souls were living in a common element; breathing the atmosphere of the same immortality: bound, however destiny might separate them upon earth, to the one great home. And yet a painful thought would keep rising to dim the happy vision—"Was it right of Reuben, after he knew from her of the situation of things between Mr. Hurley and Marianna;—was it right of him to pay such marked attentions to her cousin: evidently," Katharine thought, "such as were calculated to elicit from her, affection?" Of Marianna's share in the matter she would not, and did not, from the first, permit herself to think: she felt that if she did, and it turned out as she feared, she could not love her.

Katharine preferred, in this matter, not to see the truth itself—if that truth were as she supposed—till it was inevitable ; and hope suggested that, if ever it should indeed become so, habit would by that time have enabled her almost to blind herself to its impropriety. But some minds are instinctively truth-loving, even in the face of the bitterest anguish. Such was Katharine's ; and all her self-control was not sufficient to prevent a question of the decorousness and integrity of Reuben's conduct from darting occasionally through her mind. But exactly as our own love is purest, do we excuse the offences of its object : exactly as we are more or less worthy, do we insist on believing those we love to be so. The leading moral attribute of Katharine's character therefore antagonized the intellectual, and at length overcame it. Whatever might be the extent of Reuben's offence she forgave it ; happy in the thought that her prayers were ascending from the same spot as his had done. She seemed to feel safer too within his home ; but she reasoned down the longings of a human heart for mortal affection by the thought that, after all, that was not the most high and glorious of the passions, but only a poor earthly type of that which is reserved for hereafter.

Again the morning sun shines bright on the smooth waters of the bay ; again a busy little party surrounds the breakfast-table in the front parlour, and the projected enterprises of the day undergo discussion — how voluminous discussion those will best comprehend who have most frequently sat with our fair fellow-creatures under like circumstances. But the upshot is that Willoughby means to do just whatever he is required to do : they “ must settle it among themselves.” Mrs. Bracton means to sit and rest herself after her journey (there being probably a little spice of vexation that the old gentleman is not here as the cause of the decision) ; Mary and Katharine mean (or rather Mary means, in virtue of both Katharine and herself) to go across through the bush, and see the improvements on Willoughby’s ground — “ and Miss Marianna, too, perhaps, will like to go — they will be very happy in her company ” (a fib of Mary’s), “ but not, if she thinks it will be too tiring for her, as she is weakly.” Finally, Marianna, who immediately penetrates the Daisy’s thoughts, pronounces that she shall not go.

Thus passed on the time from day to day : Mrs. Bracton seemingly best pleased to sit and

work, and look out upon the flashing surface of the bay, and occasionally vary the monotony by straying into and round about the buildings; Katharine utterly monopolized by the hostess. Ah! she says, in reply to Katharine's remonstrances in her poor cousin's behalf, she can talk with Willoughby another time. But the Daisy never lets out a word, even to Katharine, about the *tête-à-têtes* they have after supper, when every one else has retired. Yet Katharine might almost surmise the fact from the singular resignation that the young sailor displays throughout the day. Marianna, who beneath her satire conceals a very loving disposition, and, in her heart, fully appreciates the freshness and sweetness of her intended sister-in-law's character, contents herself, by a sort of mute understanding with her cousin and her brother, in Mrs. Bracton's and Willoughby's company only; and yields, as much as her strength permits, to his appeals and remonstrances with her to be out of doors and about in the atmosphere of the salt water.

In the mean time, Mary little imagined what she was doing: she did not surmise how much she was promoting the tendency of Katharine's heart to domesticate itself there. When Katharine

rine stopped suddenly amidst some wild or lovely scene in the bush, or lingered, and spoke not on the grassy water-side, or sat lost in thought in the rooms where the two retreated to be by themselves, Mary did not imagine what caused the sudden stop, the lingering, the abstraction. Perhaps Katharine herself even could not have told her. But this was it:—something within her whispered, “Katharine—this is thine home. Katharine—its owner is thine, too.”

Willoughby at length informed the ladies that one of the boats had brought him a summons, on business connected with the ship’s duties, to Sydney: it would be for them to decide whether to return with him or to remain longer. Urged by Mary’s protestations against such an early departure, they concluded to remain a while longer.

A couple of evenings afterwards, as they all sat working after tea around a blazing fire, the latch of the back door was lifted, and the firm, deliberate step of Reuben was heard coming along the passage. Mary sprang up at the sound, for she knew the step; and Katharine too sprang up, for she knew it also. Marianna and Mrs. Bracton only listened, and looked towards the door.

"You're come at last, then, Mr. Kable," said Marianna, as Reuben entered, holding out her hand, but without rising.

"Yes, Marianna, and very happy to see you all looking so comfortable. Pray be seated, Miss Katharine," said Reuben, as he exchanged greetings throughout the circle. But that "*Miss Katharine*" went to Katharine's heart. To her cousin, it was simply "Marianna." Reuben on his part thought—"Marianna feels herself at home here; Katharine doesn't."

And now came back upon Katharine the reflections that had troubled her so before; and they came all the more forcibly that she now found herself under Reuben's roof. Before she had consented to join her relatives in the visit, she had contemplated the position: but a sense of personal rectitude, and unwillingness to withhold her attendance from her cousin, together with a sense of the awkward mystery that would attach itself to a refusal; and even, it must be added, curiosity to see Reuben's dwelling-place, and perhaps a lingering beam of hope, united, had caused her almost immediately to forego her scruples. But now it seemed to her that she had done the most undesirable thing imaginable, and placed herself, she

could not help thinking, in a most humiliating position. Could it be questioned that her first frankness had been unobserved by such a close observer as Reuben Kable? Why, he had argued that her track to the hill-top was the track of one alone, from a circumstance so slight that to her it would have never suggested anything: the same quickness of conception was traceable in his remark about Mr. Hurley's arrival: and then, again, how rapidly and effectively he had dealt with the hands on the farm. It seemed quite indubitable that he must have fully understood her first display of feeling towards him; and equally certain, from the familiar and insinuating kindness of his manner to her cousin, that his taste was for such a character as Marianna's, and averse from such a one as her own; while he must regard her, for the very ingenuousness itself, with contempt. Again, therefore, the cautiousness, stiffness, and frigidity of a vexed self-esteem came back into Katharine's manner, and came back more definitely and more expressively: amounting even to a display of uneasiness in Reuben's presence.

After the first day at home, Reuben found something or other requiring him to be away

from the farm during the chief part of the day. A close observer, however, might have noticed tokens of attempts on his part to meet with Katharine alone: but they were always thwarted, either by her own misconceptions, or by Mary's monopolizing procedures. And so on till Willoughby returned to escort the party back to Sydney.

One incident occurred, however, which, if Katharine's mind had not been so much disturbed, might well have brought home to it a clear conception of the case. After all had retired to rest on the last night of their stay, far on in the night, the old cook came, and, knocking at the young lady's door till he awoke her, reminded her that her window was open, and that it was raining very sharply, with a strong wind on that side of the cottage. Some one evidently had been wandering out in the bush at that late hour—some one who felt interest enough in her to observe her window through the darkness and tempest of the night; and yet as evidently not the messenger, for he was shivering, and his teeth chattering, as if he had just come out into the cold from the warm kitchen where he slept.

Yet, glad as Katharine now was to get away,

she could not help feeling a sinking of heart as she walked down the path in the morning along with Mary towards the wharf. Willoughby and Reuben were engaged on board, making all as comfortable as possible for the party, and Mary's namesake was to make a special trip without cargo for them. Mrs. and Miss Bracton were already at the water-side.

"My dear Mary," said Katharine, "you distress me. Pray do not let me have to think I have left you so unhappy."

Mary could only sob. She had her thoughts: had had them all along; but she could not bring herself to tell Katharine what they were. But she dried her tears, and went forward. Half-way down, Katharine also lingered, and turned back and gazed.

"When?" cried Mary, through fresh tears, as she marked the forlorn and earnest expression of her friend's face.

"Oh—perhaps—almost certainly—*never!*—*never!*"

Katharine dropped her veil. Mary, who cared nothing about the sailors seeing she had been crying, so that the skipper didn't scold her for it, did not wear one.

At length all was ready, and Reuben and Mary passed round to make their adieux. Oh, Love! Strange tell-tale against thyself! Never yet known to keep thy secret finally safe! Mary selected Willoughby for the last grasp of her hand; but Reuben selected Katharine. Katharine's heart (cold as were her words) throbbed visibly under the silken vestment, as if it would beat its way through; and ere she had well closed her hand on the Australian's, it withdrew itself convulsively. Reuben felt it, and wondered. Taken in connection with her coldness and frigidity hitherto, it puzzled him: it had the effect on him of a contradiction in terms. But Marianna also saw it, and she looked at Reuben (though he looked not at her) and saw his astonishment. And then Marianna sat down; and it was not till the roll of the ocean surge began to discompose herself and her fellow-passengers that she ceased to ponder.

CHAPTER II.

Tidings from England.—Sire and Son.—A Family Council.—A Loan.

THE *Harponier's* oil and bone were transferred to the owners' stores in such "double-quick" time, and Willoughby heard so many dry hints whenever he stepped into the counting-house, as to "how bad her hold looked when it was empty," that he judged, all circumstances considered, the best thing for him to do would be to get away again down the harbour as quickly as he could. A veteran might have ventured to take his own time.

The ladies, therefore, being landed at Sydney, and lodged in an hotel there, were obliged to write to Mr. Bracton, sen. to send down the groom with the little snug curricie, which they had now for some time had; and Mary had once more to resign her lover to adventure amidst tyrant surge and treacherous wind. And well it was for him,

for her, for all, that none knew when, and where, and how they were to meet again.

Yet scarcely was his vessel out of sight of land, when the first note—and a wild and startling one it was—of the last great passage of his and all their fortunes rang out from the trumpet of destiny.

“Mama,” said Katharine, as she whiled away the now long, long hours, one evening, by reading the day’s paper a second time over, “here’s a letter for Willoughby, advertised in the post-office list of undiscovered addresses:—‘Willoughby Bracton, Esq., Sydney, N. S. W.’ That must be from Charles: probably a packet with letters for us all. This is why we have n’t heard from the dear fellow so long.”

In another instant both mother and sister, from behind Katharine’s shoulder, were poring over the name, as it stood amidst a host of others in one of the columns of the ever-multifarious list.

“It must be for us,” exclaimed Marianna: “I have never heard of any one else of our name in the colony yet. That, with the rarity of the Christian name ——”

“And ‘Sydney,’ too, you see,” observed Katha-

rine. "If there were any stated resident of the city of that name, he surely would have been known: but Willoughby being out at sea when the letter arrived, they could not find him."

Mrs. Bracton only tried to clear her throat; and then hurriedly and nervously rang the bell. The waiter on coming up informed the ladies that the post-office was closed for the day. They had to wait—and such waitings are some of the hardest portions of our schooling in the virtue of patience—till the office opened next day. Then the letter was soon procured.

Truly enough, it was in Charles's own handwriting. But it was only a single letter: there were evidently no others enclosed within it. Was it to be opened? They thought; and they all said, *Yes*. He might be ill: for why else had he written only to his brother. Mrs. Bracton looked pale as death: her hand trembled so violently that she could not break the seal. Marianna took the letter out of her mother's hand, opened it, and glanced her eyes rapidly down the page. What is the matter? The sister, dropping the letter, has sprung up with an exclamation full of sorrow,

surprise, and anxiety. Katharine hastily picks up the paper from the hearth-rug. "Read—read—Katharine!—my dear, tell me what it is," sobs and cries the mother: for Charles is his father's favourite, and therefore hers: they have often told each other they should die without him. Slowly and painfully, half-blinded with tears and half-choked with sobs, Katharine, who had fondled the lad in his babyhood as passionately as his mother had her, goes on to read:—

"London, 3rd January.

"DEAR WILLOUGHBY,

"I can hardly make up my mind to write this letter: but I know so well it is what you would wish me to do under the circumstances, that I must try.

"Not to keep you in suspense, the occasion is this:—I have let myself in for a debt of upwards of 900*l.*, for which I have given bills payable in twelve months. It is true it is a debt which can never be recovered by law: but unless I pay it, I shall live for ever henceforth under an ineffaceable stigma. All my friends in the profession know of it: their eyes are upon the result; and wherever I may be hereafter, I shall meet

with some of them. What am I to do? I know you will say that, if possible, it should be paid.

“Well, I want you to see my father, and break the matter gradually to him, and tell him that if he will furnish me with the amount, I shall consider that I have no future claim upon him. At the same time, do not lead him to suppose that by so saying I mean to forget him or any of you. I shall only the more readily hasten over to join you.

“I can’t say any more. You know the case just as it stands. And I shall await anxiously yours in reply. Believe me, dear brother, yours, as ever,

“CHARLES BRACTON.”

“There!” said Katharine, as she laid the letter down on the table.

Mrs. Bracton seemed to recover herself wonderfully. Her face seemed to say, “How foolish of the girls—it’s only some money gone—there’s nothing the matter with himself.”

Katharine saw what was passing in her aunt’s mind; and taking up the letter again, she said:—

“You see what the date is, mama: nearly eight months ago. He’ll be wondering by this time; and then despairing; and then who can tell what he may not do?”

The mother's soul was again in agonies ; and she trembled from head to foot like a tree whose leaves are shaken by the wind : in her extreme agony she moaned aloud, and would have fallen, but her niece and her daughter hastened to her support.

"Don't let us forget, mama," said Marianna, after a few moments, "what papa has often told us of late—'That the night is ever the darkest and coldest just before the dawn of day.' Let us go home to him directly."

"We *must*," said Katharine ; "there is not a moment to be lost. It is now August : there is barely time to transmit the money to England before the bills will be due."

Waiting no longer for their own vehicle, the ladies set off next morning by the mail, thus saving several days. Of Lieutenant Bracton forgiving and doing all he could for Charles, they had no fear : but they doubted whether, on such a sudden demand, he could raise the necessary amount in cash ; and a still more distressing consideration even than that, was the long and anxious suspense they must all undergo before information of the result could reach them.

The worst apprehension, however, pressed upon them from the circumstance of the singular affection and community of feeling that existed between Charles and his father. The old gentleman was deficient in affection towards none of his family; but towards Charles it was a passion that brooked no restraint. In person, understanding, and temper, there was such a perfect similarity between them as to make them appear, when seen consecutively, rather the same being, viewed at the two ages, than different individuals. If in any point there was an observable dissimilarity, it was in the son possessing a larger intellectual organization than the father. But that, after all, only promoted the main effect of this agreement of character: only brought the child the more effectually and readily into sympathy with the parent. Even before the infant could talk, his large, open, meditative eyes, constantly watching his father's face, seemed to maintain a mutual intelligence between them. Then, as he grew on into boyhood, his father, and no one but his father, was his standing authority in everything; hence they became inseparable companions. Charles's presence (it was a matter of almost jealousy in the

little circle) atoned to his father for every other absence. And, on the other hand, against every arrangement that separated him from his father Charles fought a hard battle. In his early years he had inclined to a naval life; but when Lieutenant Bracton retired from the profession, all thoughts of Charles following it passed quite away, as if by a tacit accord between themselves. And, in like manner, when the family emigrated, the lad had wanted to give up his studies and accompany them; but his father's remonstrances, uttered, as Charles knew, strongly against the impulsion of his mere feelings, prevailed on him to remain for the period needful for the completion of the course. And now the ladies said to one another, with a breathless apprehensiveness, "What will papa feel if anything should happen to Charles, when he recollects how anxious brother was to give up everything and come with us; and only submitted to stay behind because papa was so earnest with him to do so?"

But the tale had to be told—the letter shown—the ordeal gone through. Visibly and on the instant, the effect was scarcely discernible; but the smothered emotion soon began to proclaim its

violence and extent by tokens ever indicative of great inward agitation and disturbance of the mental constitution—an entire change of ordinary habits. No viand sufficed to provoke appetite: the first, the second, the third night passed, and Mrs. Bracton had to tell her children each morning, in growing dismay, that their father had never slept; during the day his chief observable inclination appeared to be to keep himself in perpetual occupation; as if by bodily action to allay and check the tendency to commotion in the mind. But he made no remarks upon the subject, and asked no counsel. All this was so different from his customary habits, that they felt at last that the silence was becoming intolerable, and that they must speak to him. The task was assigned to his daughter: standing behind his chair, and putting her arms round his neck, she went, in her own style, in the style she knew he would listen to least impatiently, directly to the point:—

“Well, papa; what is to be done for my brother?—something or nothing? We want to know.”

“I can’t tell, Nanny. I know of nothing yet but for me to go to England by the vessel that sails out of Port Jackson, a week from yesterday.”

“ Papa ? ”

“ I know of nothing else. Another vessel sails in three weeks : but I could not raise the money in the colony within that time ; and then no other sails for six weeks, which will be too late, without any doubt.”

“ No more vessels than two in the six weeks ? ”

“ Yes, several ; but none in the latter three weeks direct for England. Several are advertised to go round by China and the East Indies : but they would be too long on the passage.”

“ But I thought you had upwards of six hundred in cash, in the bank still ? ”

“ No : I have parted with it to within the last fifty pounds, since you went down the country, in part payment of two more flocks of fine-woolled sheep. I have no resource but to borrow the amount required here ; which will certainly take three weeks, if not an entire month, to accomplish ; or else proceed to England and raise it there : which I can do, I dare say, easily enough. If I attempt to raise the money here, there will be first nearly a week’s journey to Sydney ; then, not improbably, as matters go at present, it will take another week to find a party to come to an under-

standing with ; then, that party will wish to come or send his agent up here to inspect the security ; and then there will be his journey back to Sydney again. So that, taking the common probability of delay, and the time for the transaction of the business itself together, I cannot make sure of being in time. The only other alternative is as I said at first. But I know you like to make one in a council of war about anything of importance ; so, if you have anything to say, let us hear it."

"No, papa : we are all depending upon you."

"Well, think till to-morrow morning ; I must then decide."

"Katharine and I are agreed that we would rather get our living as sempstresses as long as we live, than let Charles be stigmatized as dishonourable : but mama says the debt oughtn't to be paid."

"Pooh, pooh ! Not paid, eh ? It's bad enough for it to have been contracted. As it is, there is only one party a scoundrel : if it were left unpaid, there would be two."

"I am glad you think so, papa."

"It is not the loss, Nanny, that grieves me : but I am apprehensive about this unfortunate

delay. Willoughby 'd only smoke an extra cigar over such an annoyance; but Charles"—and shaking his head, he left the sentence uncompleted. "I tremble when I think of his waiting day after day, expecting an answer and getting none. However, let us not talk any more: the matter is *to do something*."

Marianna did think, as she was bidden; and what she thought was very much to the purpose: but she could not make up her mind to utter it. She thought, "If the Sydney people are so hard up for money with their over speculating, I dare say Mr. Moses is not; and here he is on the very spot, and knows all about our property and character: we pay him a large bill every year, and he is as fond of me as he can be." This was true enough: but, there was something else which Marianna also revolved in her mind that was equally true, though far from as agreeable to contemplate. "But then," thought she, "this *faux pas* of Charlie's will hardly escape becoming known to Rachael, or, which is even worse, surmised by her without being acknowledged by us. She will naturally become aware of the loan: she knows no exigency of ours here requires such a

sum on a sudden ; and will inevitably connect it with our brother at home. The large amount, and the precipitancy of the business together, will surely infuse suspicion into her mind ; and suspicion will ask questions and observe signs, and then everything will tend to reveal the truth."

Though much recruited in strength by her trip to Brisbane Water, and still further roused by her brother's remonstrances, Marianna's condition was yet that of an invalid ; and, by evening, thought upon thought, along with the solicitude which caused those thoughts, had quite overcome her. She had now, as often before, when perplexed by the overaction of her mind, to call Katharine to her councils ; and, laying all the *pros* and *cons* before her cousin's clear understanding, desire Katharine's judgment on the matter. As usual, her cousin solved the problem instantaneously :—

"Don't you see, Nanny, you are thinking in your own interest and not in either Charles's or Rachael's? You are considering about the accomplishment or non-accomplishment of your own favourite plan ; not what will be best for themselves or even most agreeable. If Rachael (who, meantime, can as yet care very little about Charles)

should dismiss him from her good opinion on account of this affair, why, she will suffer nothing in doing so: her very disapprobation will neutralize her regret; and as for Charles, surely there are other women in the world besides Rachael: but if there were not; which is best for him—to be got out of this dilemma, and afterwards take his chance for her; or remain in it, and perhaps be lost to us all?”

Next morning, long before her usual hour, Marianna had risen and was seeking her father. He, as we all so often do, had overlooked the near and facile, in the distant and difficult: but he now saw that Marianna's suggestion was in all probability the most available one, and certainly that which ought to be the earliest experimented. Indeed, its probable success seemed so great that he walked in with her quite altered in countenance and manner; and partook of breakfast with a degree of cheerfulness and appetite he had not before shown since the distressing tidings arrived.

After breakfast, Mr. Bracton—first reminding them that if he should be unsuccessful at the township, they might see him no more for some months—bade his family adieu, and rode forward.

The aged Hebrew was at home, and after the first surprise, listened with deepest attention to the proposals made to him. Lieutenant Bracton refrained, of course, from specifying the occasion of such an urgent demand upon his purse: he merely stated that in the course of the mutations of life, such a demand had been made upon him from England; and that in the event of his not being able to command the sum in the course of three weeks within the colony, he must proceed by the vessel advertised then to sail, and realize it by means at his command in the parent country. He offered, as the course both most ready and much the most agreeable to himself, to give bills at twelve months for it; or, if that were not satisfactory, to accept it on mortgage, on the usual terms. The conversation was between the two elders themselves, alone: Rachael was not present.

“Vell, vell!” said the old Hebrew, in a slow, soothing, and considerate tone, after he had heard Mr. Bracton to the end; “it ish all de gootness of Got! He vill gif ven he shee fit; and ven he shee fit he vill take away. I haf vonce lose fifteen hundred pound in von day, and I never doubt it

vas de gootness of Got. Indeed, I find it out
aftervards dat it vos noting elsh. You shall not
vant for de bit of monish, Mr. Practon. I vill
take your bill : I pelieve you are a risheous man ;
and you are very kind to Rashaël ven everypody
else vill not look upon her pecause she is a Jewess :
and your daughter, too, love my shild as if she vas
her sister. You shall haf de monish, Mr. Practon,
and I vill not sharge you all de interesht too, vat
I can make mid anypody elshe.”

That evening, Marianna wept over the feeble
and trembling signature of the Jew, of late rapidly
becoming weaker, at the foot of a cheque which her
father drew from his pocket-book, for a thousand
pounds ; and, early next morning, Lieutenant
Bracton was on his way to Sydney, to effect the
remittance by the vessel which was to sail in a
few days.

CHAPTER III.

The Bushranger's Progress.—Reward offered for Beck's Apprehension.—Tom of the Swamp.—An Outlaw's hardships.—“ Marcus George, the Scholar.”

It was now some weeks since the Black, startled by the information he had derived at his interview with Reuben Kable, “took the bush,” as it is termed in the common parlance of the country. When working in the brushes at the head of Brisbane Water, he had heard of Reuben as a fellow native of the colony; and he knew, by general repute, that his character was such that he was not likely to have been jesting, or wantonly intimidating him. Reuben was considered to be a young man of remarkably upright aims, and as bold, straightforward, and undissimulating in pursuing them.

With the warrant hanging over his head already, and the probability that a reward for his apprehension would be advertised in the public papers,—aware of the almost infallible alertness of

the colonial police, and sensible what a marked man he was by his colour,—Beck saw at once that there was now no safety for him, except in the fastnesses of the wilderness. Such a life had no charms for him ; and he felt that, having gone thus far, he must go yet farther. He now sought, therefore, to escape from the colony altogether ; and to effect this, he must have money from somewhere. “After getting so much, and working hard so long, it’s hard indeed,” he thought, “if I can’t secure some of it.” How to get at his money in the bank he was puzzled : he could devise no expedient that seemed sufficiently practicable and safe. For the present, therefore, he gave up that question, and turned his mind to his cattle at the Coal River. He thought he knew a settler near the coast, north of the Coal River Settlement,—a man originally a convict,—one of the lowest in point of morals, but well off in point of property, to whom he could sell a large selection from the herd. They would be difficult to get in, and, under the circumstances, far less than their value would be offered : still that was better than nothing. He therefore concluded to push off to the nor’ard and ascertain what could be done.

All this while, however, the gang had been making itself notorious. The stock-keepers round the quarter, though they did not choose to take part against them (and indeed, in most cases, could not do so without compromising their own safety) yet looked very cool upon them, now they had come to be virtually condemned men. It was evident to them that the career of the gang must have an end sometime or other; and then who could tell whether when in gaol they might not bring others into trouble. Dubbo, too, reported the conduct of the Black in terms anything but advantageous to him. "I mean to say," said Dubbo, "that a man who would shoot a dog that had followed him, in such a cowardly manner, would shoot his own mate if it served his turn. I took care to keep my weather eye up till I got away." And Dubbo, accordingly, had not only not visited his former associates any more, but had resolutely determined against having any hand in their depredations for the future.

Thus Beck and his comrades found their supplies much more difficult to obtain than they had expected. Whenever, singly or collectively, they visited the hut of some adjacent stock-keeper,

they were welcomed to a feed, and had plenty of verbal sympathy lavished upon them: but the hut was almost always "just then short of flour;" and a most ostentatious "look out" was kept whilst they remained, to signify to them, as civilly but as strongly as possible, that their visit was felt to be dangerous and unwelcome. Irritated by this, they felt the more inclined to abandon themselves to violent measures.

First, in the exigency of the hour, when the last pound of flour was baked, a distant and solitary shepherd's hut was visited and ransacked; then followed a more wholesale forage of an entire line of stations, which afforded a supply for many days; and, finally, as they returned to their haunt one evening from a visit to one of the friendly stock-keepers, they came upon a dray laden with stores, on its way to form a new station on one of the minor streams tributary to the Morrumbidgee. The opportunity was a rare one, and the temptation great; for they had been to look for some flour and tobacco, and had got none. After a few minutes' consultation, they rode up to the party, and representing themselves as stockmen, lingered about the fire till the bullock driver and his mate

had gone away for a while ; and then Beck, who was the only one of the three who happened to be armed, took charge of the overseer with a cocked pistol, whilst Morgan and Dubbo loaded the three horses with as much flour, tobacco, tea and sugar as they could carry, in addition to their riders, without much checking their pace.

It happened that the dray belonged to one of those gentlemen who hold seats in the Legislative Council ; and (we need scarcely remark) a robbery to the amount of five shillings of the property of one of the magnates of the human race, is of infinitely more consequence every way, than a robbery of fifty pounds done upon a person of inferior condition : consequently, ten days had not elapsed before the following proclamation appeared in the *Gazette* :—

Colonial Secretary's Office, Sydney.

“Whereas, it has been represented to his Excellency the Governor, that there is a gang of bushrangers committing depredations on the stations adjacent to the Morrumbridge River ; and that in addition to other felonies, they have lately robbed a dray belonging to a settler on its way to the interior ; and that

the said gang is armed with fire-arms; and further, that the principal individual is a native of the colony, of the name of Martin Beck, *alias Black Beck*, against whom there is already a warrant in force from the Bench at Newcastle, on a charge of cattle-stealing: This is to give notice, that a Reward of Fifty Pounds will be paid to any individual who shall lodge the said Martin Beck in one of her Majesty's Gaols; and a Reward of Twenty-five Pounds to any individual who shall give such information to the Police as shall enable them to apprehend the said Martin Beck.

"Beck is a black, the son of American parents. He stands rather over six feet high; stammers slightly; and is well-built and good-looking. Age under thirty years.

"By command of His Excellency."

A few days after the proclamation was gazetted, Dubbo called at his countryman's at the township to have a glass, and was shown the document immediately.

"Was n't I a good judge?" exclaimed Dubbo.

"I know'd there 'd be no luck with such a fellow as that. But I must have this paper, you know, Peter. It won't do to let 'em drop in for it foolish : must give 'em the office."

When Warraghi next called at Dubbo's, the *Gazette* was handed to him ; and by him carried home to be read to his principal. Beck laughed, half in contemptuous irritation, half in the irritation of fear, till every pearl-white tooth in his head was grimly visible.

"You see what I'm worth, lads : fifty pounds ! Not a bad chap, that governor ! 'Tis n't every body he 'd take the like notice of, though. However, there 's one good turn he 's done me : he 's put me fly not to show in the Coal River Settlement—just the very place I should have gone to ; for I thought all along it was a warrant from the Bench of Maitland. Warraghi, you can write I wish you 'd write us a bit of a scrawl to the ld bloke, to tell him he 's what I call a trump. If it had not been for this, I should have run slap into the noose, and never found it out till it was too late. However, now, I 'm off to-morrow."

Beck accordingly started next day. The road he had to traverse is a cross-track, between dis-

tricts that have so little business communication with each [other, that a traveller is comparatively a rarity upon it. Still he omitted no precaution, that from his knowledge of the country and its customs, he thought advisable. As much as he could he kept the bush ; and where he was compelled to ride along the road, he shunned both travellers and stations as much as possible.

When he came into the more populous region of the Hunter—the lower part of which it is that bears the name of the Coal River, from the mines at Newcastle, the settlement at its mouth—he concealed himself in the ravines by day, and travelled by night ; and thus, as a mounted horseman, and passing through the main settlements at an hour when his colour could not be distinguished, he succeeded in reaching his destination in safety.

The individual whom Beck had pitched upon for dealing with, was at home ; and still, as formerly, living a solitary life. His ground was on the edge of a great swamp, covered with reeds in summer, till they were dry enough to burn ; and then becoming bleak, black, and desolate looking, till returning spring brought forth the crop again. His hut and small bit of cultivation ground were

slightly elevated above the morass itself; and all round it on every other side, there was the still, dreary, melancholy forest. One old man was his companion: but whether a partner, or servant, a relative, or a stranger, no one knew. The curiosity of the country around, on this point, had exhausted itself in vain: but there was a prevalent notion abroad, felt rather than acknowledged, that these two men were bound together by mutual fears, and mutual remorse for some dark deed they had committed. Each had a hut of his own: they talked very little together, and what they did utter to each other, was never known to have the tone of faith and friendliness. Each did what he chose; and, when he chose, reproached the other without mercy for oversights and neglects. Some of their cattle they seemed to have in common: but by far the larger part running in the bush behind belonged to the youngest man only, who seemed to make this private portion of the stock his hobby; his resource from the uneasiness of a mind not sufficiently occupied by the duties of the tillage, or distressfully wrought upon by some more hidden cause. There was no female about their place, and it only rarely occurred that a wandering tribe

of blacks was detained for a few hours for some special purpose.

Beck arrived at the hut of "Tom of the Swamp" a little before midnight. He knew the bush hereabouts well, for he had traversed it often to some falls of cedar lying in this direction. Half a dozen words sufficed to recall him to the recollection of the younger man, to whom his offer was to be made. The door was quickly unbarred, his horse turned off in the hobbles, a fresh supply of fuel placed on the embers, and supper set before him. His host told him at once that he had long ago heard of the warrant, and now knew of the reward; nevertheless he entertained his proposal, provided it were worth anything. Beck could remain, he said, out of sight there, whilst he rode over and looked about among the cattle, and heard what the neighbouring stock-keepers and little settlers said about them. It was nearly daybreak when they terminated their consultation, with everything (as Beck hoped) satisfactorily settled; and after breakfast his host departed. It was not till the next night that he returned, when Beck could see, by his jaunty but dissatisfied air, that it was a failure. By every

body's account, Tom said, and so far as he could judge himself from riding through the ranges where the cattle were, there appeared to be no chance of getting in one out of every score, without a whole troop of horsemen to assist; which was what he could not command: besides, the best of them were gone. By ones, and twos, and threes at a time the pick of them had vanished. A stockman told him, that one little settler had, to his knowledge, shot such and such a bullock to supply himself with beef; and the little settlers returned the compliment in like manner on the stockmen. Beck offered the chance of them at a lower price—at next to nothing. No! "Tom of the Swamp" would have nothing to do with the concern.

The Black had, therefore, to retrace his steps. It was almost the coldest period of the year, and he had to camp out for security almost every other night. The mountains were bleak and forlorn-looking by day, and by night the cold fog, passing at times into the light hoar frost of this part of the colony, lay thick and cheerless over the flats and swamps. Mile after mile in terror, day after day in hunger, night after night in

damp, cold, and solitude—such was Beck's journey there ; such was his journey back. Going, he had some expectation of success, a gleam of hope to cheer and invigorate him : but all the way back, with a jaded frame and a worn-out horse, suffering hunger and cold, and tormented with ceaseless apprehension of being identified and arrested, he was doomed to the dismal perplexity of baffled schemes, and the blank despair of seeing his last air-built castle in ruins. The gaol, the dock, and the penal settlement, danced before his eyes ; the clank of the leg-iron, the hiss of the scourger and the yell of the scourged sounded in his ears. Early one morning the wretched fugitive reached the Basin of Rocks ; as he drew his bridle beside the smouldering logs in front of the Ghibber Gunyah, and hailed Morgan and Warraghi to turn out, his eyes looked blood-cast and fierce, and he only a skeleton image of himself. His comrades eyed him in silence, and exchanged significant glances with each other.

A fresh source of perplexity and annoyance now presented itself to Beck. During his absence, his comrades, in their wanderings through the bush, had met with another party of three bush-

rangers ; and, acting on the impulsive desire for company, had assented to their offer of joining them, and conducted them to their own haunt. To Beck's clear understanding, it was immediately evident that this compact was ill made. His aim was to gather booty, and make a specific use of it; whereas the three new comers were mere thoughtless, slothful characters, who cared for no more than living from hand to mouth ; seeking nothing till they were in extremity, and then becoming regardless of the future, in exact proportion to the successes they obtained.

Their leader was one of those pretenders to knowledge who have so unaccountably the gift of imposing themselves as superlatively sagacious on the vulgar and uneducated. Beck instantly saw into the man's character, and abominated him the more because he felt himself unable to expose him. His Christian name he gave out to be Marcus Theophilus George ; and he was related—so he further gave out (though this was evidently received with different degrees of belief by different parties)—to a very honourable and ancient family in Ireland. One of his companions was a hard, black, bullet-headed, little man, a country-

man of his own; the other an Englishman, from one of the rural districts, who had been in the army, and had been transported for some contemptible theft on a comrade—a poor mindless piece of village animalism. Upon these two Marcus George had made great impression; and, once sensible of the pleasures of leadership, he could not think of contemplating their renunciation. Already, before Beck's return, his character and title to direct the gang had been fully canvassed; and the claim of the fresh aspirant to the office began to be a matter of consideration with Brown and Warraghi. In fact, the feeling in favour of his competitor had so far established itself, that Beck could see that if he attempted to get rid of him by any violent measure, he should also be forsaken by his own comrades. Nothing therefore remained but to put up with the inevitable evil, till the course of events should cure or alleviate it. All went on, for the present, nominally under Beck's direction; but everything, in the mean time, tended more and more to sour his temper: making him feel more reckless, and preparing him to act more desperately.

One evening over their fire there had been a

long conversation about their prospects, and about the most safe and advantageous course to take. Marcus George had been maintaining that it was possible to escape by land from the colony: Morgan and Warraghi, as well as his own comrades, felt inclined to believe that he was right; and it was in vain that Beck protested and explained his reasons for knowing to the contrary. Marcus George assured them that if they followed out the Port Philip track due north, for about three parts of the way to that settlement, and then went off at a right angle to the westward, and only kept in a straight direction long enough, it would be impossible for them to miss “Timo.”* And then, by waiting till they got the chance of taking a ship from the natives of that country, they would be able to get to America.

Beck at last jumped up, and, going into the hut, brought out the empty flour-bag, and holding it with the mouth downwards, shook it significantly several times, as he stood in the midst of

* It is an old legend amongst the more ignorant of the convicts, that Timor, or as they call it “Timo,” is easily attainable by land from New South Wales, and that once there, they would be free from recapture.

the group. The action at once recalled to the recollection of all the necessity for an immediate supply of provision.

“We’ll put off going to America,” said Beck, “till we’ve got something for the road. I wonder whether you could tell us, Mr. Scholar, how that’s to be done?”

The consultation that followed terminated in their general concurrence in a plan which Beck had been for some time meditating, of plundering the stores of the old Hebrew, and by which he felt almost sure of securing a sum of ready money. The origination of the scheme tended to establish his influence against that of his rival; and it was determined to put the project into execution the next night.

CHAPTER IV.

A Marauding Expedition.—Robbery of the Township Store.
—The Ring.—The Jew's Failing Intellect.

THE distance from the haunt of the gang to the township, was too great to admit of the journey and the robbery taking place during the same night; for it was now the long hot days of summer. Early in the morning, the three who were not mounted, set forth to make their way to the rendezvous; which was appointed to be in the mountain overlooking the township from the opposite side of the river. Beck, Morgan, and Warraghi, were to follow later in the day; they consequently sat at home, resting themselves and consulting, whilst their less lucky associates toiled onwards on foot. The latter had left a bankrupt commissariat at the Ghibber Gunyah—no flour, no tobacco: yet on they must go. Their day's provisions consisted of no more than some fresh beef, part of a beast lately shot, and a small quantity of

tea and sugar for refreshment at noon. At length noon arrived; and, heated and weary, the three kindled their fire in the shade of a huge gum-tree, beside a water-hole they had been directed to by Morgan, a little way off the direct track.

The pusillanimity which is such an invariable attendant of overweening conceit, began to work more and more powerfully on Marcus, as he drew near the spot which he supposed would be the scene of danger. His inclination tended more to wandering about the outskirts of the colony, and obtaining a meal, at one time from the unsuspecting hospitality of the shepherds and stockmen; at another by stealthily entering huts from which the inmates were temporarily absent and helping himself; and elsewhere by selling some article he had stolen at the last place he had visited. He tried more than once to disengage his two old comrades from the enterprise, that they might all once more betake themselves to a roving life together; for while he felt disinclined to the daring species of outrage that is necessary to the support and congenial to the temper of a gang, he shrank just as nervously from the lonely life of a solitary bushranger. But his attempt was vain: both the

old soldier and Rooney were hungry and in want of tobacco, and all they could think of was the plenty they hoped to revel in next day. Above all, they could not forget that the men at home were intending to call at a station in their way, and make sure of a keg to bring off some spirits in, in the event of the Jew's store furnishing none sufficiently small and manageable. To all the instigations of Marcus, therefore, they only replied by advice to him to be patient : but it was not till quite late in the afternoon, when the sultriness began to be tempered by the cool breeze of evening, that they succeeded in getting him to move forward.

The few last chill minutes of twilight shewed them looking down on the township from a thicket of close scrub on the brow of the mountain. Incited by the mere instinct of fear, though there was no necessity for it, they stood huddled together behind the butt of a huge old tree, like men endeavouring to conceal themselves. At noon-day perhaps a strong eye might have descried them ; but, even if descried at such a distance, their character must have remained unknown.

At length the township itself was lost in the darkness ; then one by one disappeared the solitary lights : only those at the public-house remaining. But as they listened they could hear voices at the soldiers' quarters calling to each other, and could observe that the lights there were re-illuminated ; after a little while, there was loud and earnest but jovial talking, and then the clatter of arms and of a number of horses' hoofs swept off to the farther side of the plain, in the direction of a bright light on the opposite hills many miles away. An instant or two afterwards, their three companions came walking their horses rather sharply along the level ridge on which they stood ; chatting merrily but cautiously, and seemingly (as indeed they were) congratulating themselves on some very good joke.

“ Oh ! ” exclaimed the Black, as, his eye piercing the darkness, he was the first to discern the three of the gang who had arrived before him, “ so you 're here.”

“ Nobbut we wor as fur back again, Mester Beck, I wouldn't moind,” said the soldier : “ but ah mun say aw think as wir luck izant in toneet. An' aw foind it varry coild mysen,

without a bittan a bleeze. Foalks is up at court-house."

"Ah, and out of the way for this four hours to come, too," said Beck; chuckling in more good humour at the success of the device he had had recourse to than he had shown for a long time.

"We rode round by Montpelier farm," said Morgan, volunteering the explanation Beck had not troubled himself to give, "and just showed, and told an old shepherd that we meant to camp in the ranges over there to-night; and we kindled up a good fire, and left it for the soldiers to warm themselves at. One must do one's enemies a good turn once in a way, you know. But we hardly thought the news would have got in so quick."

"You talk about cold, soger," added Beck: "only for that move, we might have had something worse than cold. We must wait a couple of hours longer yet."

In the mean time it was arranged that they should all proceed in silence together to the edge of the bush; and that from thence Warraghi, who was an old hand at housebreaking, should go on alone; and, approaching the store on the

side opposite to that on which the dog was tied, disengage a sufficient extent of shingles from the roof to enable him to enter by the aperture. He was then to unbar the door, without noise, from the inside, and flashing the light of a single match through the darkness, afford them a signal at once brief, noiseless, and intelligible. If the inside could once be gained, they considered that the dog would be too perplexed to proceed to more than a few growls: but if he should turn out more intelligent than they expected, some more efficient means must be resorted to for silencing him. Beck had always feared that an unwise step had been taken in admitting three such men as their latter comrades into the gang; but principally he suspected that Marcus would not prove staunch. He therefore could not be lost sight of at such a juncture, but was included in the party that were to enter the store; whilst Morgan and the soldier were left to hold the horses.

The two hours were nearly past. They could see, by the steady way in which the fire on the hills had hitherto kept sinking, without any fresh

and sudden blaze, that in all probability the police party, who had started from the township in pursuit of them, had not yet arrived so far. But in the mean time the sky had become completely black with clouds; and a rough cold wind began to draw along through the bush. Occasionally, as it increased, it swayed the tree tops heavily, and then ceased,—sounding as if some violent contest between unseen beings was on the eve of commencing over-head. The blaze on the hills revived too, as the air became more and more agitated; and at length up flew whole clouds of sparks: not once only, but again, and again, and again. Beck instantly pointed it out.

“Do you see that, my lads?—there!—and there again! That’s more wood the soldiers are throwing on. It’s given them a job, to climb that mountain in the dark: it’s sure now to be full three hours before they’ll be back, if they’re back before morning. Ten to one they’ll stop and look for us there, for we left an old blanket and a tin pot behind, to make ’em think we’d only just bolted. Now, let’s have no dropping down: every man do what he’s told, in the way he’s told. We all understand, you know: so to

work, Warraghi: it'll never be nearer the right time. Only, of all things, do what you've got to do as still as death: and mind what I told you about the dog's-chain; it's fastened to a staple inside the slabs, and runs out between them. He won't hear you, with this wind blowing, till you're inside; and then, if he begins to make a noise, run to the chain at once, and drag it through till you've got his neck tight against the slabs: and we must wait till all's quiet again, and you flash the match."

Warraghi, who, though professedly a thief, was not a courageous man, proceeded to his task with palpitating heart. But it was one of those situations in which deeply-formed habit soon predominates over natural disposition. In ten or twelve minutes' time the sudden brief light of Warraghi's match was seen from the door; and the others, from the edge of the bush, passed in noiseless file rapidly across the green, led by Beck. The latter and Rooney had arms, and carried the bags. Marcus, at Beck's suggestion, had been requested to carry the keg; and that being a more unmanageable load, he had left his arms behind.

The marauders safe within, the door was instantly re-barred ; and through the shuttered window there was no fear of detection by the light. Once more a match flashed amidst the darkness, and the dog, startled by the light as Warraghi with trembling hand seized one of the store candlesticks and lit it, gave a fierce bark, and then growled intermittingly, as if perplexed. The Black, throwing down everything but his pistols, instantly darted round, and stooping into the little skillen, seized the end of the faithful brute's chain and drew it in, hand over hand ; till, as he threw his weight upon its full extension, the rougher and fiercer sounds that the dog emitted during the struggle terminated in broken, stifled coughs. All stood motionless awaiting the result : but of that there needed have been no doubt among them ; for every half-minute the sallow eyeballs of the Black turned on Warraghi with a sneering glare, as if to say, " Tell Dubbo when you see him next." After some minutes, Beck slackened the chain and waited—no motion : slackened it yet more, and waited ;—no, none : laid it down, and laid his ear to the slabs—not a sound !—and then he sprang up, and laying hold

of a tumbler that stood on the head of one of the butts, half filled it from the tap, and drinking it off proceeded to hand similar doses to his mates. Since he had become a bushranger, and especially since his journey of disappointment to the Coal River, Beck's habits of temperance had been gradually, but not slowly, giving way; and now, whenever spirits came in his way, he drank unscrupulously to the fullest extent which a hitherto unimpaired system enabled him to do with tolerable impunity.

The middle door opened immediately on lifting the latch; and within all was undisturbed and silent. For an instant, Beck hesitated: suppose he should find himself face to face with Marianna! But it was too late to recede. He passed forward, first to the door he supposed to be Rachael's: for he knew that when the old do sleep, as evidently the Jew now did, they sleep heavily. He tried the door, and it also opened: the room lay all in neatest order, and rich odours of the rose and violet pervaded the cool, still air; but the couch was vacant.

His quick ear, laid to the door of the other room, quickly informed him that the old store-

keeper slept, and was breathing uneasily, like one in a troublous dream. In another instant, first passing the light to the nearest hand, Beck's gripe was upon the old man's throat. But in vain, as the Jew awoke to an affrighted consciousness, did Beck demand money from him: he maintained (whether it were true or false) what he once said before—that all the coin he had taken lately had been required to give the balances of their checks to his customers; further, that checks themselves, which Beck would have been very glad to hold as security, had been despatched by the last mail to Sydney. Still his assailant could not believe a Jew to be without money; and, leaving the old man in the custody of Marcus, he ordered Warraghi and Rooney to "get on and fill the bags: it's all round you—you can't go astray;" and proceeded himself to search the house minutely. Once more his stratagems were to turn against himself. One of the first things that he cast his eyes upon was Rachael's watch, and appended to it was a ring containing a braid of her mother's hair. The old man half rose as he saw the sacrilegious hand of the outlaw upon it: but by a struggle of intelligence he subdued his

emotion, and waited quietly till the Black had proceeded into the store and was endeavouring to break the desk. Then he turned, and beckoning his guard close up, and speaking cautiously, he said, "If you vill pring me dat ring again, I shall gif you more monish ever so mosh ash it ish vort;" and again speaking a second time, as if the excitement of mind had just stimulated him to take so much notice, he added,—“and if you ish in trouble, I shall shay you vos de only man vot come here to-night vot hash no firearm;" and again, after a second or two more, as Marcus George stood hesitating how to act, he adjoined, “bot you mosh not tell Peck: he ish a great rashcall. He shell you; take my vort for it, he shell you de firsht time he haf a shance. He vant to shell hish own master to me,” added the poor old man, falling from the tone and gesture of a feeble indignation into a sort of paroxysm of the laughter of second childishness. “Bot you come to-morrow, or next day, or any day vidin a veek or two, and I shall gif what I shay for de ring; and I shall keep it dark. No von hurt you.”

Beck searched till keg and bags and all were filled, and carried across and lodged securely for

travelling on the horses: nay, till his associates began to talk so loudly and boisterously that he had to check them; and even he himself, adding glass to glass, saw the light of the candle, as it gleamed dissipated and enfeebled through the capacious apartment, rather like a thick mist than aught else: but his search was unsuccessful.

Getting all his mates off to the further side of the green, he took the precaution of locking the feeble old man into his room; and—although his voice could have no power to reach either the court-house or the other dwelling-places in the township—told him that he meant to keep watch on the outside till daybreak, and would not spare him for an instant if he attempted to give an alarm. By daybreak, however, the party of marauders was several miles advanced into the ranges, in the direction of the Basin of Rocks.

In the morning, all who were in anywise connected with the old man heard with regret what had befallen him; though the gang had for some time become so notorious, by the commission of dray and other robberies, that it created but little surprise. Rachael, overwhelmed with grief, hastened home from the Rocky Springs; un-

sparingly reproaching herself for having left her aged father alone: little and useless as must have been any aid she could have rendered in such an emergency. So inveterate had become his habits of parsimony and solitude, that no persuasions could induce him to retain a night-watchman, or even allow the occasional porter to sleep beneath the roof. Lieutenant Bracton even called and reasoned with him: but ineffectually.

Beck had secured a number of small articles, and at the division of them, Marcus succeeded in obtaining the ring; contenting himself with the thought that that at least could be converted into ready money, as soon as he could find an opportunity of visiting Ghiagong unobserved. It was some weeks before he was successful in getting into the vicinity of the store without associates; and then he had to wait till nightfall before he could venture to approach it: but when he did so the old Hebrew instantly recognised him, and, mindful of his promise, withdrew him into the inner room.

Rachael wondered much when she saw her father conducting a man of such abject and disorderly appearance into his own room; and still

more when, on coming out, he proceeded to give him a very ample supply of tobacco. But her wonder vanished on his departure; for, closing the doors after their mysterious visitor, her father re-entered the sitting-room, and with a smile of exultation laid down before her the regretted ring. He gave her to understand, more indeed by antic gestures than sentences, and with the exhibition of a gleeful cunning which wrung tears from her eyes, that he had made a compact with the robber to betray to him any similar depre-datory project upon his property which Beck might contemplate. Indeed, from the night on which he had suddenly opened his eyes upon the grim scowl of the black, Lazarus Moses was never himself again; and every day the tokens of declining understanding and bewildered sentiment grew stronger and more constant.

CHAPTER V.

Reuben and Katharine.—Marianna and Mr. Hurley.—
Lieutenant Bracton's Difficulties.—Fresh Anxieties.—
Death of Lazarus Moses.

REUBEN KABLE, after the departure of his friends from Brisbane Water, spent many an hour in perplexed thought, as he wandered through the mighty forests of gum-trees, pursuing the occupations of the bushman and farmer. In a virtuous and pure mind, a very little suffices to set the organism of hopeful thought into action; as in a mind of evil consciousnesses, fear is easily evolved. When Reuben recollected his first interviews with Katharine, it was clear to him that he had then enjoyed her confidence in no ordinary degree; and when he reflected on the almost convulsive way in which she had withdrawn her hand on board the boat, it was equally clear to him that there were deeply excited feelings connected somehow or other with the change. But whence could any such feelings have originated? He was not

sensible of anything on his part that could have caused them: his sole aim had been to benefit the family during the month of his residence amongst them. Nay, more; they all had manifested the most lively sense of his services—Katharine herself not excepted. And then he went on to ask himself:—“How can I have in any way offended Katharine? Katharine is labouring under some misconception about me, I am sure. What can it be? At this point his powers of analysis refused even to suggest a supposition. Where an error is made up by the action of several minds, the powers of one are inadequate, except in very rare instances indeed, to ascertain its nature; and this law prevails the most forcibly where minds are diversified by opposite kinds of education.

Katharine also, on her part, as the violent shock subsided which Charles's letter had given to them all, thought of many things which had not struck her before; not a little assisted by the occurrence of new circumstances. Marianna still spoke of Reuben with high regard: there was even a yearning for his presence; but attended with a tacit and unconscious intimation that she could find ample compensations for his absence.

Besides, Marianna also spoke of Mr. Hurley sometimes; and, as Katharine perceived, it was with a very different tone and class of thought. Rachael, too, who was so especially in her cousin's confidence, did not seem after all to doubt Marianna's adherence to her first choice; but often made hopeful allusions and arbitrary remarks.

At length an event occurred which brought back almost the clear daylight. Once more there came to the cottage a letter in the handwriting of Mr. Hurley, addressed to her cousin; and with eager trembling hand, and cheek suffused with nothing of the sallow hue of hate, but the glowing and fainting of a carmine light through a hundred tints—Marianna received the communication, and opened it. In it, Mr. Hurley entreated once more that she would not throw away his happiness, and he hoped he must also imagine her own, by a misconception of his character. And now that sober thought had supervened, Marianna's conscience at once ratified the justice of the remark. Indeed, so much of her exuberant vivacity had melted away, that there needed little to suggest that the world was not made for her will alone: she was becoming habituated to feel

less of will itself. In the next paragraph, Mr. Hurley went on to say that he never ceased to think of her; that sometimes such long-continued anxiety, added to the toils of business, greatly depressed his spirits, and left many an hour to cheerlessness, which, but for this unhappy misunderstanding, he should devote to hope and recreations. And all this Marianna knew must be very true; for the thoughts of those who love, prepared specially in regard to each others' minds, enter and establish themselves without suspicion and without challenge. At length, therefore, when Katharine had been asked her opinion for the first time—and possibly because the question was already thoroughly decided—and when Rachael also, for the hundredth time, had expressed her opinion, Marianna permitted her friend to say, in *her* next note to Mr. Hurley, that “as soon as she was a little better she would try to write to him:” and that note it was not long before Rachael had despatched.

Still week after week passed away without the promised letter being sent : unsatisfactory attempts were over and over again made to pen it, till the task seemed almost hopeless of satisfactory achieve-

ment; and the duty became one which it was more easy to hold in the mind as a thing determined upon, than one to be immediately performed. Oftentimes such little matters contain lessons so difficult of acquisition, that it requires the aroused attention of the whole spirit to learn them; and involve modifications of individuality so complete, that the actor hesitates over them, from a sort of doubt whether he will know himself again after they are effected. Such were the acknowledgments which Marianna felt she ought now to make, but could not bring herself to pen.

At this time it was that the outrage at the store took place. Disconnected, as in itself it seemed, with either Katharine's or Marianna's individual prospects and future happiness, it was far from being so in reality. The months were slowly creeping away, leaving but a small interval between the date when the bills given by Lieutenant Bracton would become due. Rachael now scarcely ever left home to visit them; and whenever they saw her, they imagined she displayed an increasing disquietude of mind. It was natural enough that she should feel discomfort in the contemplation of her father's increasing infirmities: but there seemed

yet a something besides which pressed, if possible, more painfully on her, but which she carefully refrained from giving utterance to. If she could say at any time that her father was much better, there was but little relief of the saddened expression of her countenance. Marianna at length assumed the license of friendship, and inquired, more than once in vain, what was the hidden trouble of her friend. At length, when further disregard of these importunities seemed to be the greater unkindness of the two, Rachael, with many protestations of her own undying fidelity, consented to tell the tale. Her father—now almost as incomprehensive of the larger and more profound relations of things as a child, and probably secretly anticipating his own early dissolution—was perpetually contemplating the time when the bills would become due; manifesting all the avidity of age, along with the inconsiderateness of childhood. It seemed as if the reclamation of this money back into his own personal possession had become to him as the last great transaction of his life,—one from which there was no weaning his thought till it was accomplished.

“And believe me, dear Marianna,” said Rachael,

concluding her statement, "I would not tell you this even now ; but that it seems an act of imperative justice to your father, in case he should be depending on paying the interest and renewing the bills. I never noticed the feeling in my father before that dreadful night on which he was so ill-treated by the bushrangers ; but ever since then he seems to think nothing is safe unless he can really touch it or see it. I am sure that, in his natural state of mind, he has a high regard for you all."

"I don't know," replied Marianna, "whether to look at it so seriously as you do, or not. I know papa has not made any arrangements to meet it by money from home ; and I really don't know how to talk to him about it. I must ask Katharine. Papa frets so as it is, that, though he says nothing, or very little, it's clearly wearing him to a shadow. Oh ! Charles ; my brother !"

"Your brother, Marianna ? Then it isn't a loss you have had—but——"

The tale could be kept back no longer. At first the cousins had not known whether to tell Rachael the truth of the matter or to withhold it ; and, whilst doubt remained, caution had been spontaneous. But by degrees, as they found themselves

unable to determine upon a mutual view, the subject of the occurrence itself also became a hackneyed one, and all mention of it had dropped, except in the most general way. Now, however, Rachael's frankness, as she consulted with her friend, threw Marianna entirely off her guard. Marianna, indeed, had but this one secret reserved from Rachael; and Rachael's ingenuousness had now made good its claim to that as a matter of right. Of course the sister told the favoured brother's fault as softly as it could be told, save by a wife alone. And if Rachael sighed in secret over the first romance of her heart so rudely handled by truth, it was with no hasty, no ruthless vow, that not any reformation or change of circumstances should even yet prevent that romance from becoming a reality.

Katharine, meantime, advised that Lieutenant Bracton should be informed without delay of the course into which the business was diverging.

"The fact is this, Rachael," said Katharine, "he is depending partly on meeting the bills with his resources here; looking to two contingencies for at least half the amount. We expect Wiloughby in before the twelvemonth expires; but, in the event of his non-arrival, papa depends on

renewing bills for that portion of the amount which he would have borrowed from him. The bills, if I am not mistaken, date from August: it is now late in January. Why, there will be barely time to make other arrangements as it is."

Without the delay of an unnecessary hour, Katharine informed her uncle of the unpleasant contraction of his prospect of meeting the demand. Lieutenant Bracton, once more throwing aside all minor matters, immediately proceeded to take the necessary measures; at the same time but too clearly betraying his apprehension that, such being the state of Mr. Moses's mind, too much time had already been lost. And now another sudden journey to the capital was inevitable.

But as Katharine and her cousin came to reflect over these things after the departure of Lieutenant Bracton, other and far more serious bearings of the matter became apparent to them. Marianna asked herself, and inquired of Katharine, whether, involved in such circumstances, she could properly enter into a correspondence with Mr. Hurley without mentioning them. Katharine assured her that her promised letter ought to be written, and the circumstances themselves, at the same time,

candidly mentioned. But Marianna found this so great an addition to the difficulty she already felt of acquitting herself to her own satisfaction, that again, and again, and again, delay followed delay.

And now to Katharine's own mind arose the doubt—whether *she* could take advantage of the new and cheering light that seemed as it were just dawning upon herself. She felt quite convinced now, that neither her cousin nor Reuben Kable regarded each other with any affection surpassing friendship ; whilst towards herself Reuben seemed not to hesitate, in many little expressions and messages in Mary's letters, to avow a special attraction. Mary inquired after Marianna's health in common with her brother : but in regard to *herself*, there were many notifications of his feelings which Mary did not presume to join in, but only related. Mary appeared to feel that in all her brother's sentiments towards Marianna she might freely participate ; and unite in all he said : but just as clearly did she appear to understand that Reuben's regard for Katharine was quite a different emotion from her own. Amongst other things, she wrote that “ Reuben was counting the days till his business would call him to Manarou

again, so that he might call and see them once more. He felt that he did not yet know Katharine half well enough, and sometimes feared she must think him very inconsiderate." And now, just as this bright light was dawning, a dark mist arose to shroud and darken it. "Can I," thought Katharine, "if Mr. Kable does indeed feel an attachment to me,—can I allow him to be deceived by remaining ignorant of this heavy blow on our circumstances? And, in the event of a difficulty arising in the payment of this money, even upon our conventional position, will he not impute to me a selfish duplicity? If I am ready to run the risk of acknowledging it, why not do so? If I am not willing, is it not desiring to retain his attachment by disingenuous means?"

Lieutenant Bracton returned from Sydney, depressed by the opinion of his notary that the necessary business in England could not be transacted, and the remittance made to him, within the period at which it would be required; and that, in all probability, it would not arrive till two months later. Thus cloud after cloud continued to rise over their prospects, till it seemed as if they would become wholly involved in gloom.

There was yet, however, a bright spot or two, through which dawned rays of hope. On the farm, everything went on more and more satisfactorily: the flocks were once more in a healthy state; and the men, now in immediate and continual contact with their master, were going about their occupations in a straightforward and steady way. Within doors, also, the sheet-anchor of domestic enjoyment held fast: Mrs. Bracton kept on "the even tenor of her way," neither less active nor more impatient than at any other time; happy in being able perpetually to dispense comforts to those around her, and consoling all by the gentle benignity of her character.

Still the time wore on, and on, and on; yet Willoughby did not appear. A period much beyond that which he had been out before had now elapsed, but no vessel could be heard of that had spoken to his ship since he sailed from Port Jackson. The *Harponier*, moreover, was known to be a vessel which, though good in other points, was by no means in the best condition for meeting with heavy gales of wind: and such there had been. First, Mary's letters had carolled with hope and expectation; then, they manifested im-

patience and conviction that there certainly could not be any much longer delay of Willoughby's arrival, mingled, however, with acknowledgments that Reuben was constantly reminding her that she was misled by Willoughby's first speedy success, and was totally underrating the average duration of the voyage. But lovers know nothing about figures or averages. Finally, a fit of silence upon the subject ushered in forebodings so sad, so touching, so broken-hearted, that Katharine often shrank from reading a second time those portions of the letter where they had clustered most thickly.

Then came again an alleviating circumstance. A letter arrived from Charles: his fortitude had maintained itself till the dreaded day; nay, over the day: resting on the assurance in his own mind, and the explanation to his creditor, that some delay must have taken place; and that nevertheless the money would arrive. And now he proudly and fervently told them how sure he had been, the more and more as he reflected, that his father would never forsake him in his hour of need; and that after this it would be a very little while indeed before he should be with him. Then, under the impulse of awakened gratitude and

filial feeling, he spoke (which was more to his parents than all) of the regret he felt for having allowed himself to be led from the straight path of rectitude into such an indiscretion. This letter Rachael was permitted to read as a sort of set-off against the former concealment and the fact itself; and before she had read to the signature, her tears were trickling down into the midst of the glowing words.

But how rarely does joy come without sorrow. If Rachael's heart yearned toward the character of her friend, much the most intensely as she supposed it to be embodied in the absent brother, it was an imprudence; the moral penalty of which lay registered on the scroll of a law that no hand can alter. Every fresh submission to the emotion brought with it a more trying solicitude about the result of the approaching crisis. She now, moreover, never left home; and when her friends spent a few hours with her there, those feelings of uneasiness with which we watch any diminution of respectful regard for those we love, caused her often to feel deep pain when Katharine and Marianna inevitably witnessed some of the ever fresh foibles of her aged parent. In some points,

indeed, he had now quite lost sight of all his highest principles: like one wandering in darkness, he clung convulsively for support to whatsoever came to hand; be it what it might. The miserable spy, whose services he had secured, had become magnified in his estimation into an indispensable protector; so that oftentimes the three young women had to leave the sitting-room whilst the imbecile, old man brought in this despicable character—who could only sneak in from the adjacent bush by stealth—and kept him there concealed, till he heard whatever tale the low felon had to tell; and then, giving him meat and drink and a supply of tobacco, employed his restless senile cunning to contrive a safe exit for the wretch into the shelter of the contiguous bush.

Yet, after all, these things were but the gathering of the thundercloud. Suddenly began to roll the peals that heralded the discharging of its deluge.

The warm beams of the fast-coming summer shone through the window into Rachael's little room, as she sat penning a note to her friend. The morning had been more than ordinarily bright

and hot for the season ; and such days in the climate of Australia are those which are found to be so oppressive. In the very aged, and such as labour under cerebral disease of any kind, their effect is to produce a morbid sensibility and excitement. All the morning, Rachael had felt her attention irresistibly drawn to the more than ordinary restlessness of her aged parent : the feeble pilgrim of life's last stage, like one toil-worn to the utmost, was staggering through the last few steps between him and the goal of his mortal life. Yet to her understanding, inexperienced in these symptoms, there seemed no reason why he should not last a twelvemonth longer. All that a fond and dutiful daughter could do for her parent, she had done : all day long her eye had scarcely been off him a minute ; she had stood and complacently listened and soothed him, as he childishly came over and over again, and consulted with her about the bills. He had eaten his mid-day meal heartily and with relish, and then gone to take repose in his room. Once, immediately after he had lain down, he rose again, and (as if without that he could not sleep) came back and kissed his daughter, and blessed her, laying his hand upon her head, as

was his custom ; and then went in again, and, as Rachael supposed, was fallen asleep.

At length she heard him uttering her name several times, amidst a confusion of words ; speaking sometimes in English, but more frequently in the language of their forefathers : not as if he were calling to her, but as if addressing one whom he alternately congratulated and remonstrated with. Nor had his speech the incoherent and stumbling course of him who speaks in a dream : its tones had a clear, a thrilling, an agonizing meaning, as if inspired by some heart-rending theme ; its sentiment was as appreciable as that of the death-march pealing at midnight from a band of trumpets. And still, as she held her breath, she heard her own name uttered again and again. Then congratulation seemed almost merged in remonstrance ; the remonstrance once or twice almost rising into denunciation. And that was a tone of her father's voice so new and incredible to her, that she was at once sure something extraordinary must be taking place ; and starting up in alarm, she ran in.

He was sitting on his bed-side, with his hat on, and his hands crossed upon the head of the

staff he now always used, like one who had come in and sat him down to rest, on coming off a long journey. His eyes were closed ; but his lips moved, though their utterance was not now audible. Some overwhelming thought agitated the whole man, but seemed as if it no more belonged to any region beyond him. Suddenly, as his daughter stood gazing and wondering, his words broke forth again, slowly and mournfully, yet resolutely.

“ Oh, Ra-sha-el ! Ra-sha-el ! Vere ish my shild ? I cannot do midout my shild ! ”

“ My father ! my father ! ” cried the maiden ; “ I am here, I am here ! indeed I am : and, as her tears burst passionately forth, she threw herself on her knees, and clasped the tottering frame of her father in her arms.

“ Go away ! go away ! ” cried the old man, impotently striking the floor with his staff.

Rachael lifted up her face, and gazed on him in breathless astonishment.

“ Oh, Ra-sha-el ! ” he went on again. “ De shild ish *not* mit me.” And then he added, in a stern, impatient voice, “ Haf you not got her mit you ? ” And then she understood that it was

not to her, but to her mother, that he had been all along uttering his mournful appeals.

“My dear, dear father!” she cried, “I am here with you—at your side. There: it was I who kissed you then. We shall meet with your other dearer Rachael somewhere else, you know, by-and-bye. Speak to me: open your eyes.”

But the fond appeal reached not the departing spirit: already it was too far away: only the skirts of its retinue, a few disorderly thoughts, now lagged behind in the tenement it had been summoned to quit. She took his hat off his head, but he struggled feebly to retain it: the large veins of his brow were swollen with the effort; and crying out, mournfully, in the feeble, querulous tone of an infant, “It ish a long, long vay: bot I vill come again by-and-bye. Ve cannot do midout de shild, Ra-sha-el”—he made a resolute effort to rise, supporting himself on the head of his staff. But in vain: he stopped—trembled—sank—fell back—and was no more!

CHAPTER VI.

The Orphan Heiress.—Oshee Simons and his Wife.—
Rachael's Apprehensions.—Mary Kable's Despondency.—
Sorrows of the Bracton Family.

THE reader will recollect that we have now traced the life of the Hebrew maiden through several years. At the commencement of her acquaintance with the family at the Rocky Springs she was but eighteen years of age; she had now passed one-and-twenty. Neither natural nor conventional laws interposed any obstacle to her taking full control of the property she had become heir to by will. There were several arrangements, however, made by that will, which it is necessary to advert to.

Lazarus Moses had requested two merchants in Sydney, with whom he had for many years done business, to act as his executors. One of these was a gentleman of his own nation; the other of Gentile birth. After specifying the various modes in which his capital would be found invested, he

directed, that as each transaction he was engaged in within the colony could be successfully brought to a termination, it should be done, and the sum thus accruing paid over to his daughter (all his just debts having first been liquidated). In another part of the document he gave Rachael his advice respecting the further management and security of the property.

Almost without exception, these investments within the colony were found to be in the form of mortgage, and the periods themselves were yet far from complete. The amount advanced to Lieutenant Bracton was, with the solitary exception of a sum under a hundred pounds (a loan to a poor Jew), the only claim for which there was not the most ample freehold security.

His property in Europe also became his daughter's; but, of course, would not become available to her for some length of time. Finally, he advised Rachael not to relinquish the position he had secured, but to continue to carry on the business exactly as he had done.

Meantime, only a few weeks had elapsed since supplies to the amount of several hundred pounds had been forwarded from the stores of these exe-

cutors in the capital : but no mention was made how the amount thus due was to be disbursed. There existed no particular agreement between the deceased and his creditors as to the term of credit ; so that it was left in ambiguity whether the testator wished his executors to look to the usual remittances from Rachael, or to proceed at once to satisfy their claims on the payment of the bills. At the moment, the executors exhibited no particular anxiety upon the point ; and they would probably, but for the interposition of a fresh motive, have allowed the matter to go on in its usual train.

After her father's death, Rachael became sensible of the necessity of having some one of her own sex in the house with her, and also of the assistance of male strength in the business ; and the executors suggested to her to have a trustworthy man and his wife sent up from Sydney. As a matter of courtesy, the choice of these individuals was left by his co-executor to Mr. Abrahams ; who, under the impression that it would be the most agreeable selection to Rachael, chose a young married couple of her own nation.

The choice, however, turned out eventually

(though not discoverable for some time) to be most unfortunate. It was one of those cases which so constantly occur in the colony, of individuals on their arrival seeking service, and presenting testimonials of such transcendent excellence of character, as fairly to excite a suspicion that either they must be thoroughly worthless, or else the old world very much to blame for parting with them.

For the first few days after the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Simons, Rachael felt, without discerning, that there was something amiss; and, benignant and compassionating as was her character, it would probably have been still longer before she did so, had not the keen eye and rapid intellect of her friend Marianna come in to her aid.

"I shall have everything much more orderly and nice for you in a few days, when you come to see me," observed Rachael to Marianna.

"I very much doubt it, my dear," said her friend.

"Why?"

"Oh, nothing."

"My helpers, you see, are new to the country, and both very young," continued Rachael.

“Old enough, if I possess any penetration at all,” replied Marianna, still unable to stifle the expression of her dislike, “to have quite outlived their self-respect.”

“Ah! Marianna,” said Rachael, “you are always so severe in your judgments. You really should not be so.”

“The point is not whether I am severe, Rachael, but whether I am correct.”

The softer and more pensive spirit of Rachael once more gave way before the sharper and more active temperament of her friend; and perhaps, on such occasions, there was even a hope lurking in the secret recesses of Rachael’s mind that Marianna might always turn out to be right, and that Charles Bracton might turn out to be exactly like her. For now every day, as she thought of the future—the long, the doubtful, the lone future—Rachael felt, more and more keenly, that to find herself without one loving heart to rest upon would be dreadful. As yet there was but Marianna whom she could properly call *friend*: and Marianna would marry.

Mrs. Simons happened to overhear the final portion of Miss Bracton’s commentary, and took

an early opportunity of indoctrinating her husband into the sort of estimation in which they were both likely to be held. Hosea—or Oshee, as he was occasionally called by his wife—did not, however, take this greatly to heart in a moral point of view: he gave himself no trouble to be less frequently down at the public-house, nor scrupled any the more to use the opportunities he there obtained for replenishing his funds by “gaffing” with the settler’s men he met with “on the spree.” In fact, almost any other mistress, and quite every other master, would have begun seriously to demur both to the quantity of his work and the quality of his recreations, before he had become one of the ornaments of the township many days. Of Mrs. Simons less could be said in reprobation, but that little was quite ample, being what it was: she was simply one of the greatest trollops that can be conceived. If that particular quality shows abhorrently in the person of one woman more than another, it is when it appears in a female of the Jewish race: and as contrast brings out opposite properties with striking effect, Mrs. Simons enjoyed its full advantage when the eye turned suddenly from

her mistress and rested upon herself. She did, however, it must be said, endeavour to maintain a shew of respect for her mistress, which was more than her husband cared to do.

But if Hosea Simons paid no great attention to his mistress, and to the business at the store, he by no means neglected other parts of her affairs, with which he needed have had no concern: he showed himself nowise deficient in activity respecting them. Mr. Abrahams had taken Hosea for what he was invoiced at from home, by some charitable but not too-highly principled member of the Hebrew race; and, speaking in the confidence which men naturally feel inclined to fall into in a foreign country, when conversing with persons of their own nation and their own faith (being totally unacquainted personally with Lieutenant Bracton and his family), he had casually mentioned the existence of the bills. Hosea Simons therefore, unmindful how easily, in a thinly-inhabited country, reports may be traced to their originators, now made "level chalks" with Miss Bracton, by promulgating his information at the public-house: with such rhetorical adornments as his fancy suggested. And conceiving the

possibility that, if Mr. Abrahams and Miss Moses were no longer in a state of mutual confidence, she might cease to deal with Mr. Abrahams—who, chary of so good a mart, might then instal him into a rival store—Mr. Oshee thought fit to forward to Sydney, at every opportunity, insinuations (for which he had no better authority than his own constructiveness) that the young lady was, from inexperience, so negligent in her conduct of the business, and so ruinously regardless of her own interests, that Mr. Abrahams must not be surprised if the present state of things should shortly bring about their inevitable result.

The unsuspecting, because upright merchant, had no reason to doubt the integrity of his informant; quite the contrary: and—as Sydney merchants have no time to spare for monthly journeys of investigation up the country, and matters of business must be settled without many *pros* and *cons*—he had an interview with his co-executor on the subject. It was concluded between them that Lieutenant Bracton's bills would be required to be met, *in full*, at the legal period; when they would reimburse themselves, and hand over the balance to Miss Moses in proper form.

Rachael had earnestly urged upon the executors that, Mr. Bracton's position being good in all points, and his means in reality unquestionable, no undue urgency should be shown in demanding payment of the bills; and the reception her request met with at the time, had been such, that she felt justified in communicating the most cheering expectations on this point to the family. But, within a few days of each other, Rachael received, first an intimation to the effect above specified from the executors, and then information from several parties who called at the store, that the existence of the loan was matter of general notoriety in the township. A more cautiously whispered rumour was added that Lieutenant Bracton would, in all probability, shortly be in the hands of those officials who have so long been renowned for the vulgarity of their title and the gentility of their acquaintance.

More distressing intelligence could not have reached Rachael; and as she glanced at the cause, that expression of Marianna's which had so deeply imprinted itself on her mind arose to her recollection. "Oh! Charles, Charles!" she exclaimed, with agonized feelings, when she reached

her own little chamber ; where, hiding her face in her hands, she sobbed as one whose nearest and deepest loves are threatened by a hurricane of hopeless desolation. But recovering herself, she recollected that not a moment was to be lost, and hastened to do what little was yet in her power to protect and assist those who had become more to her than herself.

In the interim, as may be supposed, the inmates of the cottage at the Rocky Springs shared in the feelings which agitated Rachael. First of all came the shock and the regret occasioned by the death of their friend's parent ; then followed the anxiety and surmises about matters of business as affected by it : which, however, were allayed by the hope and contentment arising from Rachael's assurances that full time would be allowed for a final adjustment. And now was added the annoyance of the state of things brought about by Mr. Hosea. With these also were mingled solicitude about the young sailor, and impatient anticipations of his return.

Lieutenant Bracton's experience of sea life, and knowledge of his son's ability as a sailor, made him the least apprehensive of all concerned for

Willoughby's safety ; and yet by no means the least impatient for his arrival in port. The dial on which the sun of hope betokened its decline by the most marked shadow, was the heart of Mary Kable. It no longer availed now that Reuben remonstrated ; that he kindly traced out for her from the papers, the average duration of such voyages ; that he reminded her how gaily and confidently she had once called in question the rumoured sensitiveness of Katharine. It is the very error of our race, that feeling has ever, from the first aberration to the last, overruled the dictates of the understanding. A settled despair was brooding over the spirit of the frank-hearted girl : already its shadow seemed fixed there, the grim precursor of itself. Misled by her lover's first speedy trip, alarmed by the utter absence of any intelligence of his ship, perpetually reminded, by the roar of the surf on the beach, of the awful power of the waves, and left in virtual solitude to the operation of all these influences, the sole relief her aching heart could find was to pour the mournful music of its lament into the ear of Katharine ; till Katharine sometimes felt prompted to disregard every other consideration, and con-

straining her own private feelings, go and stay with her for a time.

“You say, dear Katharine,” wrote Mary, in reply to an intimation in one of her friend’s letters, “that you would make any sacrifice to have my company till Willoughby comes home. It is very kind of you to take it for granted that he will come home—very kind: *but I am almost certain now.* If anything would do me good, it would be to see *you*—you whom I love better than anybody I ever loved yet—except, indeed, where I am bound to love above all things,—and I suppose I ought also to say, than Reuben; though I think I love you and him just alike: but I love him all the more as it comes out how much he loves you. I might always have seen he did, if I had bethought myself: I know his way so well. If anything is filling his whole mind, that is the very thing he never will utter a syllable about. But instead of thinking of this, I used to be very vexed with him when he would not let me talk to him about you; and, especially after you were gone that time, it was quite painful for some days to be in the house with him. I never could talk about you with Margaret but he used to be off

somewhere for the rest of the day. I can't help laughing when I think of how I found him out. Old Jemmy said, one morning (with an air I shall never forget) when I was talking to him, 'So then, miss, master'll be married I suppose shortly.' 'Married, Jemmy!' I said; 'you've got hold of the newspaper first this time, indeed! What do you mean?' 'Why, from what Mr. Reuben said, miss.' 'What did he say then, Jemmy?' 'Oh, I and him was yarning about Mrs. Bradshawe, miss; and I said what a good woman she'd been in this house; and master said, in that quick, gruff way he has when he means a thing,—“Never was a better woman on these waters, Jemmy, than Margaret, and never will be; except that young lady that was visiting with us a little while ago,—Miss Katharine Bracton: she's what I call the tip-topper of this world for everything a woman ought to be;” and so, seeing master was so much more silenter than he used to be, I guessed the rest.' So, when Reuben came in I said, quite quietly to him, 'What news do you think I've heard to-day?' 'Fresh family of cats, or what?' 'Cats!—no; something you'll be pleased with as well as me. Katharine is going to be married.' Poor

fellow, I really pitied him. But as I had once found it out so far, he never was very resolute in making me hold my tongue about you afterwards. So, ever since I can see it plainer and plainer every day: these messages he has given me for you lately, make me quite certain."

All this was balm to Katharine's heart. Still, it widened the foundation for the scruples and speculations already rapidly rising in her mind. Amongst other things, it answered the very opposite purpose her correspondent intended it for: she felt still less inclined to visit Mary than she had done when listening to the simple appeal of her sorrows. And, again, it urged upon Katharine's sensitive and finely harmonized mind the duty of being explicit as to the unpleasant events amidst which her family might yet have to stand publicly observed. She felt, however, that if Reuben really loved her, he would love her more under such a humiliation rather than less: she looked to him to do so: it was her claim upon him, if he gave her the title to have any claim at all.

It was very shortly after the receipt of this letter from Mary, that Rachael, receiving the executors' communication, sent her post-haste

messenger over to the cottage to ask Marianna and her cousin to come over to her "immediately if possible." As Rachael had no conveyance of her own, such was now the usual way in which any sudden councils were called amongst them: and the messenger finding them unoccupied, Marianna and Katharine were at the township long before he could get back thither.

The result of the conference was, a determination on Rachael's part to despatch to the executors a remonstrance against what she could not but consider a breach of good faith; on Marianna's part to hasten to inform her father; and on Katharine's, to lose not a minute (for the period limited was now nearly expired), in making a full and frank communication of the case to Mary, and, consequently, to Reuben—enforcing the full accomplishment of her object by an express caution to Mary as to the impropriety of concealing it from her brother.

On returning home, Marianna and Katharine found that the object of their journey was already in course of achievement through another train of circumstances. The same post out of Sydney that brought the apologetic communication from

the executors to Rachael, had also brought a civil intimation to Lieutenant Bracton, that, in consequence of the position of the affairs of the estate, his bills, on becoming due, would be considered an important resource ; and, being of such large amount, not capable of being neglected. The letter-carrier had delivered the communication almost immediately after their departure ; and Lieutenant Bracton, sensible that no time must now be lost, and that no resource remained for warding off so important a crisis but that of placing the deeds of his lands *in vadio* with the executors, had once more torn himself away from the aged and flurried partner of his life's troubles and enjoyments, and was already many miles on his road to Sydney.

Sorrowfullest of evenings was that one to them all : Rachael more restless, cheerless, and nerveless than she had ever been before ; Marianna perplexed and wounded by the premature and unnecessary rumour of what would yet, in all probability, be prevented, but feeling on its account careless of any further attempt to fulfil her promise of writing to Mr. Hurley ; Katharine compelled to write to Mary, but unable to decide what to say, yet ever and anon cheered and re-inspired by those brilliant radiations

of heavenly light that are given to illumine the souls of the faithful and pure-hearted, when they are bewildered and imperilled by earthly gloom ; and Mrs. Bracton, too—poor aged lady ! without one selfish sorrow of her own, the mirror that reflected in its clear surface the saddened images of them all. Agitated, indeed, were her thoughts. The strong old oak, beneath the shelter of whose rooted strength she felt half to live, moved aside by the rush of the hurricane, till its head no longer overhung hers, she seemed now left, as it were, to look up without earthly shelter, to the cold and awful lights above. Katharine still so gentle and faithful, and yet so restless ; Marianna changed from the high-hearted, the passionate, the fearless, into a broken-spirited invalid ; Willoughby's fate in uncertainty ; Charles's morals (and, the mother thought,—*if his morals, his all*) in peril, and he himself unhappy till he could meet them, and see that they forgave him. Rachael a sad (and might it not be) only a too beautiful orphan ! Altogether it was a panorama of sorrow such as she had never been placed amidst before. It seemed as if the evil of her days were all reserved for their close. Where—when—how was the complicated disaster to end ?

To and fro went Katharine to her chamber. That letter must be written—must be sent. But what was she to write? In what words should she tell the tale? How begin? With such a large sum so irrevocably abstracted from them, would Reuben Kable regard them in the same light as heretofore? “Oh, yes,” she said, “he was too good to think anything of that.” But if no arrangement should be effected about the bills!—though, indeed, was not the public slur cast on them already? and would not he, in all probability, have already heard of it from some of his friends going down the country? Still the letter must be written. Prudence and honour, and every moral motive pointed to it. And yet the evening passed by, and supper was over, and the hour for retiring came; and still there was nothing written but the date, and “Dearest Mary.”

Nor was it till long after midnight that that letter was completed: but then it was explicit and faithful, and full of the breathings of a heart submissive to the will of Heaven. Many a tear had sprung forth as there had had to be penned (perhaps for the last time), those words, no more of stiff and measured thanking, but of tender, love-invoking

gratitude to the brave and manly brother of her friend, "for rescue from a death of deaths; for all his goodness; and even Mary, for his very company." But it was accomplished, nevertheless. And then, Katharine would not read it over, or allow herself to scrutinize even her own knowledge of its contents: she had written only what she knew to be true—what she felt to be right. The seal and the address were affixed, and she felt that the die of her destinies, for joy or sorrow, henceforth was irrecoverably cast.

CHAPTER VII.

Turpin Charles.—Oshee at Peter Burnes's.—Beck's Desperation and Vindictiveness.—The Renegade's Flight.—Pursuit.—Rachael's Orisons.—Alarm and Resolve.

DAY was almost breaking when the vigil ceased. Yet soon after sunrise John Thomas was summoned to the cottage door, where the lady who had kept it stood impatiently awaiting him. A man was wanted to start immediately down the country : he must be well horsed, and must be the one who could be best trusted for not stopping on the road to drink. Who would it be ? One of the last hands hired ? A shake of the head followed : according to their own vaunting over the nightly pipe, they were each of them hard drinkers. The best man the Welshman could think of was one of the oldest hands : an individual already mentioned as the Considerate Man. His name, contrarily enough, was Charles Turpin ; and his hut mates, to make it more contrary still and com-

plete the joke, had long since reversed it for him, calling him Turpin Charles.

In the rough and ready custom of the place and time, half an hour sufficed to finish the equipments for a journey of far on towards a thousand miles; and in less than that time, the messenger was horsed, rationed, commissioned, and off. But if hard drinking was not amongst the vices of Turpin Charles, long gossiping was; and, as he rode along by Peter Burnes's, the temptation to "get some sort of a notion who this new Jew chap was, and try whether he knowed the quarter he came out of" was irresistible: in a half minute more the bridle was hung on the horn of a tree, and the rider, standing just outside a circle of spectators; in the midst of which was Oshee, face to face with an antagonist, whose pockets he was rapidly emptying by his skill, acquired through many a year's hard study of the evolutions of three penny pieces in the air; or, as he himself would have designated the game, "three-up."

Five minutes followed five minutes, and still the play went on: and on it might have gone till noon, without Turpin Charles getting a chance to have a yarn with his "towney," but that, un-

fortunately, the "luck had changed." Oshee was winning everything before him, before his townsman came up; and then the parties began to run on "toss for toss" without advantage on either side. Till, at length, Oshee sprang up in a passion and addressed him spontaneously:—

"Here, now, my goot fellow; I just gif you half-a-crown to go away: I haf never had a bit of luck since you come and shtand and look at de play. You haf got a evil eye."

The flash sally produced a peal of laughter amongst the bystanders; and gave the loser, who thought he had already lost enough, an opportunity of sneaking away without derision. The other parties, who were chiefly idlers without money, or companions of him who was thus dissipating his twelvemonth's wages, dispersed; and the two Londoners were left standing together; Oshee reckoning what he was "to the good, that time."

"Pretty well, is n't it?" said Turpin. "I suppose them in the left-hand pocket's the lot this time."

"Vere are you from?" inquired Oshee, instantly stopping his calculations.

“Oh, the Dials, lad,” said Turpin. “I guessed we should make one another out.”

“Make von anoder out! Vy do you tink as I don’t recollect you? ay, ven I vos that high, my poy,” holding his hand about three feet from the ground. “Here; vos n’t you’re name Conkey? Vas n’t dat dere your shtall ——”

“Well, well, lad,” said Turpin, interrupting him. “I see as you know all about it ——”

“Vy, I recollects as vell vat you vas lagged for ——”

“No need of talking about that,” interrupted Turpin, hastily. “’Tis n’t the custom here.”

“Here! Ish dere any need to drive de ducks to vater? Don’t I know? Can you shee any green in my eye? Dere ish nopody apout here vat know me; only you: and ve’ll leave ’em sho. I shay: going to shtand half-a-pint?”

“Just the very thing I got off my horse for,” said the Considerate Man: and in they went.

Turpin Charles delayed only another quarter of an hour; neither did he drink to any excess: but during the short time he stopped, he had told all his own business (avouching it by the production of the letter), and had heard all Oshee had to say

about the store and its affairs ; not failing, as the cunning, dissolute, and mischievous young Jew “put things together,” to help him out with his conclusions.

Oshee had observed Rachael's excitement the day before, after reading the letter ; he had taken that letter in and saw that it was in Mr. Abrahams's handwriting ; he knew of the urgent summons sent to Marianna and Katharine ; that Mr. Bracton was gone to Sydney in great haste ; and now further, that this messenger was going in as great haste to Brisbane Water : and finally, he knew (no one better) what reports he had himself transmitted to Mr. Abrahams. And when, in addition to this, Turpin informed him who Miss Kable was, and that her brother had for some time taken upon himself the control of the farm, and was Willoughby's partner and a monied man, he directly comprehended the critical position of Lieutenant Bracton's affairs, and that the family were making efforts to extricate themselves from the difficulty : and he concluded, as matter of course, by Reuben's agency.

But the mischief Hosea Simons did was always wanton mischief : there was no system or tenacity

in his purposes. In this respect he was an exception to the general character of his race. The ambition of setting up a rival store was already forgotten in the more attractive occupation of playing "three up." At first, this had been a forbidden pleasure; but as soon as he found Rachael was not a person to look very sharp after him, he gave himself full license, and was now almost always at the public house. All thoughts of becoming a storekeeper had subsided; and he made the whole affair the matter of a gossip with Peter Burnes; chuckling at intervals, as he thought how easily he had got up this piece of mischief.

"I shay, Peter, here: I could tell you someting, if had a mind. How eashy it ish to make a pishtol go off ven once it ish at full cock!" said Mr. Simons, with a depth of complacency.

But that part of the communication the publican did not understand; the other part he did. Moreover, he immediately saw its bearing on his own interests; supposing the fact to be as the Jew stated.

"This Kable, I judge," he said, "is going to be asked to buy the farm, in case it is seized and sold; and if he does, and comes and lives up here, there'll be hot wars between him and them chaps

that's out in the bush along with the Black, before many weeks is over. I've heard tell of Master Kable : he'd let 'em alone till they meddled with him or his, and then, if it was only a pin's point, he'd hunt 'em to the other end of the world."

The point where Peter Burnes felt his own interest to be involved was this: the gang sent in at various times for considerable quantities of spirits ; which, as they could not help themselves, and the connection was not a perfectly safe one, he supplied in just such a degree of combination with water, as the conscience of the hour suggested. His countryman, Dubbo, was the messenger from the bush, and Warraghi betwixt him and the gang. Burnes sold his rum, and Dubbo got a good drink left him, without joining in the fortunes of the outlaws, and the gang got what they wanted. It was one of those little knots of connection for general convenience, which all parties concerned are always so jealous of having interfered with : the foe of one is the foe of all. Mr. Peter Burnes, therefore, immediately ordered his man to saddle the horse and ride over and tell Dubbo he wanted to see him directly.

Dubbo came in soon after noon ; but offered his

countryman little assistance. He had left off, he said, having anything to do with cross-work, and he didn't mean to begin again: if he should get into it for the past, he couldn't help it; he must only stand it as well as another. All he ever had to do with the gang now, was what Burnes knew as well as himself: somebody put some money down at a place close to his hut, and, judging that whoever left it there wouldn't mind finding it changed into a glass of grog, he just accommodated the gentleman (whoever he might be) and rode into the township, and bought it of Mr. Burnes, he being his countryman; but as to having anything to do with the gang and their plans, he neither should nor would. This, however, was, to a certain extent, a falsehood. He held himself aloof from them as much as he could; but at times every one among them came to his hut: principally his old comrade, Warraghi. Warraghi was to be at his hut that very day; and when they met, Dubbo put him in full possession of all he had heard from Mr. Peter Burnes.

Meantime, the messenger from the Rocky Springs was making his way down the country as fast as his habits permitted.

Toward the close of the same afternoon, Mr.

Hurley retired from the court-house of his new district, perusing, with very conflicting feelings, a letter, received along with the Sydney despatches of that day, from his widowed mother in England. In it she represented to him how aged and spiritless she was now becoming; how many years she had watched over him, her only child; and how hard a lot it was now to be left to contemplate the final hour in solitude. If he had prospered, or saw that he should prosper, so far as to desire to fix his home in the land where he now was, she would come out to him: it might be rather a toilsome duty at her age; but, if everything else went well, the fatigue would be amply compensated by the pleasure of adding the whole of her little independence at once to his means. If he had not yet settled satisfactorily and would return to her, there would still remain at his command the same sum she annually remitted him, and the same literary pleasures and professional avocations as before he went abroad; and they would be together.

Grieved and mortified equally by the still protracted silence of Marianna, and almost concluding that she had never felt any serious affection for

him, Mr. Hurley felt half inclined to give up a hope which seemed every day more and more baseless, and refrain from imposing upon his aged parent so serious an undertaking as the voyage. The more he meditated, the more difficult decision became ; and when the setting sun shone in through his window, and the youngsters of the settlement were beginning to give vent to the shouts that mark the last gambols of the day, he gave up [all further attempt to decide for the time, and taking up his hat, made his way to one of the cool paths that skirt the river side.

At this same hour too Warraghi was making his way to the Basin of Rocks, with the tidings he had heard from Dubbo. The latter, knowing, as he said, "that he couldn't be doing wrong," had brought out a gallon on speculation, and Warraghi, undertaking to make the adequate deposit with him hereafter, and leaving him a bottle full for himself, now had an unexpected boon to confer on his mates.

Beck was the first to observe Warraghi's approach as he and his party sat round the fire at the mouth of the Ghibber Gunyah, partaking of their supper. Since the plunder of the Ghiagong

store, other robberies, no less daring and successful, had been perpetrated at private settlers' homesteads; flour and sugar, tea and tobacco were plentiful, and they were living, as the common phrase expresses it, "like fighting cocks." The police, however, no longer headed by a shrewd and active superintendent like Mr. Hurley, had never been able to run them down.

"Sold out once more and got the money!" ejaculated their leader, with a shout that went clattering in low, dead echoes round the rocks; and, jumping up with his knife in one hand and bread and meat in the other, he exclaimed, "Here comes the best little donkey that ever went in panniers: he can hardly waddle along under his load."

All sprang up and looked across the ragged surface of the sunken flat, where nearly midway, Warraghi was to be seen advancing, with his saddle placed on his head, his hat held by the rim between his teeth, and a couple of bottles under each arm. He was not expected to bring anything home; his visit having been merely one of old acquaintanceship to his "pal;" the good fortune, therefore, had a double zest.

"Now, we'll have no drinking before supper's done," continued Beck, as soon as the matter was explained: "Every man finish his supper before there's a single bottle broached. Set to work, Warraghi; it's a capital bit of beef: we had a job, though, to get her where we could bring her down without having too far to fetch it home. We've let the two fore-quarters hang up in a tree till the morning."

Beck had become fierce, unblenching, and reckless. Having dwelt in the colony from his childhood, his first impressions of a felon's lot were received at a period of the settlement when none of the principles of penal discipline now recognised were talked of; nay, when those acted upon were such as no one has ever ventured to put into print: such as are now to be heard of only rarely and in the legends of "first or second Fleeters." His horror of a felon's lot, therefore, brought with it desperation, and prompted him to maddest resistance.

The reports that were brought home at various times by the several members of the party when they went on solitary expeditions, were so many, and often so conflicting, that at last they paid very little heed to one another's stories, and such

talk was out of fashion. Dubbo had told his visitor what he had heard at the township: but not at all in the same spirit as the publican had communicated it to him; and Warraghi, seeing in it nothing that directly affected the gang, forgot the subject as he made his meal, and even for a considerable time after the carouse began. At length, however, there was a pause for want of something to talk about, and some one asked who'd "spin a yarn;" and then he thought of it.

"I didn't tell you yet," he said, "what Dubbo's been telling me, Martin. You know what we heard the other day about your old cove's farm being likely to get into the hands of the sheriff? Dubbo says he heard to-day at the township, that the old chap himself is gone off down the road like mad; and there's been a council of war among the women, and they've sent off a messenger post-haste for that long countryman of yours; and the letter was in Miss Kitty's hand-writing. What do you think of that? There must be something up now that's not easy, and no joke."

"I'll lay any money," said Morgan, "they've sent to the Corn-stalk to lend 'em the money; else they want him to buy the farm himself. Don't you

remember, Martin, what we heard of his saying to the men directly after you and I started—that he wouldn't see the old man beat, whatever it might cost him, because he showed him the farm?"

Hitherto the Black had said nothing: his choler at the prospect that arose before him, aggravated as it was by the recollections of the past, drove the blood into his head with such vehemence, that, but for the hissing within his ears he was deaf, and blind but for the sheets of flame that flashed before his eyes. At length he spoke, gutturally, almost in a roar:—

“Countryman here or countryman there, I'll make that fellow mind his own business, as sure as ever I can get my heavy hand upon him. A precious nice neighbour! Why, men, he wouldn't leave us sitting here three weeks. No, no! No, no! It's enough that he's spoilt my luck once: he never shall again. I'll be before-hand with him this time.”

Here Beck paused, but looked round at no man: he still sat just as when he first broke silence; only that, as he ceased to speak, he began to twirl round the piece of stick he held between his thumb and finger. So different was the voice in which he

had spoken from his usual tone of voice, that there was not an eye able to withdraw itself from him, and not a tongue offered to break the silence.

“Drink up that rum,” he said at last. “Work before play, any time! When] do you say this letter went?” he inquired, turning to Warraghi.

“That I can’t say,” said Warraghi; “but I judge it was yesterday, or the day before.” The reader will recollect, however, that it was that very morning.

“We’ve never had toll out of the skipper’s stores yet; and if we don’t make haste now, we never shall,” proceeded Beck; so we’ll just make a sweep there, and get it home. And then we’ll go and camp in Bargo Brush, or among the rocks down the river, and catch Mister Kable as he’s coming up the country, and make him take his jacket off, and give him fifty with a stirrup-leather. We’re sure to catch him if we only look out on the Sydney side of Jack Lupton’s: he always stops there one night, and we can let him get well on the next morning into that wild piece of bush about seven or eight miles on this side, and then pull him up.”

“And for the last half dozen,” adjoined Marcus Theophilus George, in his capacity of rival leader of the gang, “turn the buckle end of the strap.”

But the poor shallow-brained renegade little understood the materials he was now sporting with: what a change had come suddenly over the strong mind whose supremacy he had disputed; how mind communicates impulse, as it were contagiously, to mind; and how ferociously the Black's soul was now thirsting for revenge on his countryman for that night of peril, loss, and contempt. The attempt of Marcus to supplant Beck had for some time come to nothing with all but himself: the more he had become known, the more he had been despised; till now, even his own followers, looked to the Black as their leader. Scarcely had he uttered his addendum to Beck's decree, when, with a yell of agony, he sprang up, and rushed headlong through the fire to the other side. Morgan, who sat behind him, with the bowl of his pipe glowing hot, had quietly taken it out of his mouth and laid it on his bare neck.

“How do *you* like foul play, master?” asked the stockman, with a cool, quiet chuckle: “isn't

it enough that the sentence is passed, without your adding to it?"

Morgan Brown said and did this, not because he cared in the slightest degree about whether foul or fair play was decreed to the young Australian; but because he knew it would please the Black, and was impatient at the interference of one whom they would all have been glad to send adrift, but that they suspected he was playing false.

The discussion went on, and the arrangements were settled, and the following night was fixed for the attempt. In this fresh excitement, the liquor itself almost ceased to be prized, and was drank prodigally, in heavy draughts, with short intervals: then nothing further remained but to sleep off its effects, and "be ready for a start."

"Marcus lay down among the sleepers: but it was with no intention of sleeping. He cared not how soon he got himself into a position of security; for he was fully sensible of having become an object of aversion to the fierce ruffians around him: though he had neither desire nor design of amending his principles. He had ventured into the township but twice since the death of the old

Hebrew. On one of these occasions he had been able to catch sight only of Mr. Hosea Simons, whose reception of him was such as not to lead him to desire a repetition of it. On the previous occasion, he had seen Rachael ; when—her father being but lately deceased, and she almost as yet under a sense of acting for him—she had given the poor wretch some tobacco and food, and had remonstrated with him, and implored him to abandon his evil ways before it was too late : but the man had given himself up to be the slave of selfishness, and of all the lower propensities ; and whilst he promised to consider of it, it was only as he exulted to himself when he got away, “ to keep her on a towing line as long as he could : such a chance was n’t to be got every day.”

It was evident to him, however, that his begging business would soon be a very bad one, and that his thieving connection was a very dangerous and unpleasant one ; and he had a conviction that now, if ever, was the opportunity of “ selling ” his comrades to advantage. The deep, lethargic slumbers that presently came over the rest of the party afforded him the desired opportunity. Cautiously extricating himself from the crowd of

sleepers, he listened, and looked to see if any one turned to observe him; then drawing on his boots, he searched for the best jacket that he could find about, and in a moment more he was out from underneath the rock, and following headlong through the darkness the beckoning hand of fate.

There was no moon, but the course to the river was not a perplexing one: the river bank itself was guidance sufficient for many miles, and then there was a road. The way was not long that night to him: he sang as he went; nay laughed again, and humorously parleyed with himself as the echoes called back to him. And should he not laugh? Would he not now, by the disclosure of this plot, commend himself to people who would secure him immunity? What a rig! Why it was like cheating the devil! Who but he? And faster and more merrily he bounded along. He had to pass close to Dubbo's hut, where his misery had extorted for him many a feed. If the dogs had not jumped up and barked, he might have gone in and lit his pipe:—but what odds? he had some matches; and who'd bother with Dubbo's dogs now? On he goes; and laughs, and shouts, and smokes, and

sings. Five men traced and taken, or shot by the police!—Pshaw! Sha'n't he be safe himself? Perhaps in one of the swell's kitchens. The daylight breaks over the hills: Ghiagong is quite close. *He's* not afraid of going into the township *now*: *he's* about to be on the same side as the police themselves! Hurrah! hurrah!

The day was indeed dawning—his last. Sometime after midnight Beck had opened his eyes, and the deep gloom under the rock told that the fire required renewing. As he passed the spot where Marcus usually slept, he missed him; but he thought no more of it for the instant: the man might have risen to light his pipe. Beck gathered the ends of the logs together on the ashes, and looked round:—no Marcus. “Hoy! Marcus George, the Scholar!” No answer; but that of some ill-voiced bird, that had started shrieking at the sudden alarm, and almost fell from his perch up in a tree on the hill-side. Then dead silence. “Marcus!”—again, again, and again shouts the Black, half maddened with the suspicion that is forcing itself upon him. One—another,—all are out by the fire. “Oh, he's gone! We might have been sure of this long ago,

if we hadn't been easy fools. What's to be done?"

"We must have him, men: it's his life or ours, now!" exclaims the Black, with fierce determination. "Let's find our horses as quick as we can, and then hot haste for the township. You two on foot be off directly. Keep the regular track till we come up, and then we'll give you a lift till we get nigh hand the township: there we'll all separate, and cut him off. We're sure to be there before he can get there a-foot."

But it was later on in the night than they thought, and the horses were not found till after a long search.

Meanwhile their treacherous companion had travelled between two strong engines,—Hope in front, and Fear behind. When Marcus got into Ghiagong the store door was still closed, and no one was about in the township; but the birds were already beginning to pipe and twitter, and play about on the grass in the thin golden rays that shot almost horizontally along through the fresh air. He walked round the store:—there was a window a few inches open at the back. He creeps along on tiptoe, and standing hidden at the side, listens awhile: a voice of simple, unequivocal

cating entreaty is heard, sometimes pausing. He stoops and looks in : a lady, in deep mourning, kneels, her face partly turned away from the window : a rich shawl, bearing large many coloured flowers on an open milk-white ground is thrown over her mourning robe ; and heavy tresses of jetty black, escaped from the comb, fall down far upon it. A little gilt-edged volume lies by her side on the sofa. Again she pleads : again she pauses to listen for and comprehend the Heaven-sent answer. The beauteous sight doesn't move the man. No ! his callous soul has only thought of self—self—self. Creeping cautiously away, he goes round to the front, and raps loudly, again and again, on the door. He knows what he is doing : he knows whom that rude knock will startle from holiest attitude ; but he feels nothing save his own despicable exultation and confidence. At length a cheerful and almost lute-like voice is heard from within inquiring, “ Who is there ? ”

“ Me, ma'am.”

“ I don't know you. Who are you ? ”

“ If you'll just put your ear to the key-hole, ma'am, I'll tell you. Do you recollect the man

ould Mr. Moses asked to come and tell him if ever Martin Beck and the rest was coming this way again. Well, they 're coming; only it's to the settlers that live at the Rocky Springs, and I don't know them: but everybody says you're very thick wid 'em."

Such an intimation was sufficient. The door was instantly opened; and, trembling and almost sick with dread, Rachael heard out the tale. She thought it seemed too real to be neglected: yet how could she call on the police without surrendering her authority? And if the poor debased creature, she thought, were once in their power, and they were disappointed of the gang, would they not consign him to punishment? And if he were thus intimidated, would he not tell all he knew; and, among other things, how her poor father, in the indiscretion of his second childishness, had often harboured him? Uncertain what to do for the best, she gave him some food, and told him to go back into the bush, and keep out of sight till night, and then come to her again.

Rachael closed and barred the door again, and hurried into her chamber, and threw herself on the

sofa where she had lately been kneeling. Long, long and wretchedly, she pondered-over the tidings: but that which is within us is created to be fostered till it conquers that which is without. The evil at last forget that there are flowers, and melodies, and light; the good that there is darkness or a storm. She rose at length, pacified by faith, and nerved to the resolve that she would follow the straight path. She determined to go over instantly and lay the whole matter before Mrs. Bracton and her beloved friends Marianna and Katharine. It was really their case, not hers; and if they said the man ought unquestionably to be secured, then, whatever slur it might bring on herself by implication, she would urge him to give himself up. To carry out this determination, she must obtain a horse and a companion through the bush. Oshee was becoming so much his own master, that she shrunk from disturbing him to assist her in either way. The old porter, however, lived at one of the huts in the middle of the green, and she put her bonnet on and aroused him. One of the fencers who worked for the township was a cheerful, plain man, and knew her well enough, as he had been

there several years; and he had a brood mare running close by. On sending to him he said, "Miss Rachael was welcome to anything he had in the world, excepting his saw and his morticing axe; and them two he wouldn't lend to his own father." There were several new side-saddles among the store-goods; so, without waiting for breakfast, Rachael (to the great perplexity of Mr. and Mrs. Simons), with the old porter on foot as escort, hurried off upon her mission.

CHAPTER VIII.

Consultation.—A Demand on the Welshman.—Katharine's Letter to Reuben. — Rachael's Anticipations. — The Renegade's exultation.—His Capture by the Gang.—Trial.—Sentence.—Execution.—Katharine's Midnight Musings.

DEEPLY alarmed herself, and largely endowed with that reflectiveness and earnestness of character which secures attention from other minds, Rachael communicated all her own terrors to the listening and breathless party of females at the cottage. The facts themselves also, were calculated to terrify them even more than her: it was themselves personally who were threatened; and they had contemplated Beck closer than she had, and could more completely realize what his threats meant.

“There is no doubt,” Marianna said, “but that man, who has given you the information, ought to be secured, Rachael: without him we have no ground for demanding such assistance from the police as they must give us, to be of any service at all.”

“Katharine,” asked Rachael, “what do *you* think? You say nothing.”

“I don’t know what to say,” replied Katharine, feebly.

“Dearest Kate; don’t fret so. If you think it best that these sad disclosures should be risked”—and here the orphan Hebrew maiden paused herself: her utterance became choked; and she wept; then, with a sigh, went on. “My poor, dear father is in his grave: all that they may say of him cannot hurt him now. And as for myself, I’ll bear it patiently, freely, thankfully, if it will be of any service in saving you.”

“Mr. Bracton must be sent for, my dears,” said the aged lady. “What are the police in such a crisis? Besides, your papa would never forgive me if I didn’t send for him.”

“Papa’s coming, mama,” said Katharine, “won’t prevent their waylaying Mr. Kable: and I do think,” she added, in a confusion they all could see was as painful to her as it was uncommon—“I do think it is very likely he may come, when he hears from Mary what a sudden difficulty has again presented itself in our affairs.”

“My dear, I think Mr. Kable is quite a match

for Martin and all his gang. He is not a child, you know."

"Yes," said Katharine, as she sat, resting her elbows on the arms of the chair, partly covering her face with her beautiful white hands; "and so he'll think himself, and fight, and they'll shoot him."

They all felt that there was but too much probability in this, from what they had discerned of the two Australians' characters.

"I wouldn't have any harm come to Mr. Kable, for the world," said Mrs. Bracton; now, for the first time, seriously attending to that part of the case.

"No more would Katharine," said Marianna, seriously and lovingly, yet mischievously.

There was a painful pause of some instants. New light seemed to be breaking in upon Mrs. Bracton: she seemed gratified, and yet uneasy; and her eyes wandered toward Rachael with an expression of impatience, as if she wished she hadn't been there.

"My love," said Mrs. Bracton, in a quiet, commonplace tone (evidently, however, an assumed one), as her glance again passed quickly

over Rachael: "*our friend*, Mr. Kable, will not provoke them rashly to such an extreme as that."

"*Indeed, he will!*" replied Katharine, with a quickness and decision of tone that completely neutralized any effect Mrs. Bracton might have intended to produce on Rachael; but elicited from her younger friends their mutual assent.

The tale, and the consultation had occupied upwards of an hour, and yet they had come to no decision. At length, Rachael, forgetting all her own feelings, in sympathy and love for the only individuals of her sex (save her lost mother) who had invited that love by their treatment of her, said,—

"Well, I shall tell this poor wretch to give himself up to the police. You will then, at all events, have complete personal security: they cannot refuse, on hearing his tale and being conducted to the haunt of the gang (even if they should escape) to believe that there is such a design against you, and send you a commensurate protection."

"Still," said Marianna, with a seriousness that betrayed how deeply she now entered into the

newly-discovered feelings of her cousin, "the other part of the threat must not be overlooked. What is to be done about Reuben?"

"Why," replied Rachael, "you must let your messenger who goes down to Sydney to tell Mr. Bracton, go on to Brisbane Water and warn Mr. Kable."

"That will do," said Marianna. "I think there can be nothing better than that," she added, unconsciously directing the point of her speech upon Katharine.

"No; nothing better," said Katharine, as unconsciously answering, in complete forgetfulness of everything else at the attainment of her all absorbing object.

Marianna betook herself to write a letter to her father, whilst Katharine proceeded once more to demand horse and man from the blunt Cambrian, now overseer.

"I want you to stand my friend again, Thomas," said the young lady, as soon as she could venture to expose her features to his gaze. "The *best horse* and the *best man* on the farm; no matter what the horse is at, or what the man is at."

“Miss ! how could I be overseer if the man and the horse is take away like this ? I always was your friend, Miss : but the ’ork must be done. The master come home by-and-bye, and then what ’ood she say if I have got nothing to shew ?”

“*I’ll* put all that to rights, John. It’s a very serious affair—more serious than the neglect of a twelvemonth’s work. We’ve had information that Martin is coming to attack the station with his gang ; and ——”

“Tam her ! Oh, she is coming again, is she ? Tam her. Oh, I have a cut at her at last, then !” and the eyes of the Cambrian glittered in his head, and every limb seemed about to depart from his body in different directions.

“Don’t cherish such a foolish and wicked spirit,” said Katharine. “It is only safety that we want, not revenge. Poor man ! his day will come : soon enough for us, and much too soon for himself.”

“I settle that man myself. I knock any man down that meddle with her when she come,” cried the agitated Cambrian, incapable of controlling himself.

“Well,” proceeded his young mistress; “you must do what I tell you——”

“I have not got any man: every man that is on the farm now is drink very hard; and never go to Sydney till she have first sell the horse on the road,” said John Thomas, still obstinately pursuing his design of letting the Black make his experiment. Besides, there is no horse but the young horse Mr. Reuben, the native, have pick out for you, Miss, when she was here; and she tell me, Miss, before she go away, I am to get it shod and ride it a little myself, and not let any body else have it to spoilt it till she come to Manaroo next, and then she will break it in nicely for you herself.”

“Oh yes, yes,” cried Katharine. “That will do: send *that* horse.”

Checked, and overawed, and persuaded by the soft but impassioned tones in which she spoke, the Welshman began to collect himself and recollect what Reuben had so strenuously inculcated upon him over and over again—that his first duty in all great emergencies was, *to obey*.

“Well, Miss, I fetch her in myself, directly: she is shod a little while ago; and she go like the

wind when she like. But there is never a man but drink like a fish:—I tell you.”

“What is to be done? Where can a man be got?” cried Katharine, trembling again with fresh apprehension.

“I tell you what you do, Miss. Send a black-fellow: there is ever so many now up at the hut.”

“But, *to be trusted?*”

“Oh yes. Young Tommy often go to Sydney along with me. I make her understand anything: always could. I often leave her to take care of my dray on the road all day, while I look for my cattle. And you know she never drink, because she cannot get any money. She go if I ask her.”

“Well, do; and let me know: and let everything be ready as quickly as possible.”

But as Katharine turned in again to the cottage, she bethought herself that, though the aboriginal lad might make a good messenger to carry a letter to Sydney, he might yet prove a very incompetent channel of oral communication to Brisbane Water. Yet evidently there was no one else to be trusted in comparison, so far as his abilities went. What then was to be done? There must be a letter for him to carry on, after his Sydney mission was

performed. Besides, that would best ensure his making no mistake or forgetting the names of the parties and place he was to go to.

All was hurry and dismay at the cottage, from Mrs. Bracton to Biddy, who remembered but too well the day of the inroad of the Aborigines. Katharine withdrew to the quietude of her own chamber, and endeavoured there to pen a few rapid lines to Mary: but when she came to read them over, they appeared to reveal too much feeling on her own part; yet they by no means seemed strongly enough expressive of the importance of the thing itself. Over and over again she tried; but every effort seemed either more objectionable on the one score, or more inadequate on the other. At length Katharine concluded that it would be best to make a business communication to Mr. Kable himself; and, using for its medium the simplest terms, leave the effect to his own sound judgment, and to God. Besides, Mary might be from home, and thus a message remain undelivered; or if delivered, which was the best supposition, it might not be in the plain and urgent tone that seemed so indispensable.

This made the matter exceedingly simple! It

was merely to tell the whole business in the fewest words, and they were as follows :—

“DEAR REUBEN,

“(Forgive the omission of the date, for I am so terrified, that I cannot make sure what the day of the month is without going to ask.) We have heard that Martin Beck is contemplating waylaying you, if you should happen to be coming up the country ; and as we have to send to Sydney to my uncle, to tell him that before the outrage on you he means to make an attack on us, I have insisted on having the messenger sent on to put you on your guard. You have been so kind and true a friend, that I could do no less.

“I thought it best to write direct to you, lest Mary should be away from home, and the information reach you too late. Perhaps I take a great liberty in writing to you : if I do, I hope you will consider how impossible it is for me to avoid it under the circumstances. I feel it to be a sacred duty.

“I perceive what a blundering and awkward epistle I have written ; but really I am so terrified, that I feel confident you will make every allowance

for me. My particular and all-important object, you know, is to beg—to implore—that you will not come up the road without plenty of company; for there are five of them, and they threaten to commit the most horrible outrages upon you. I cannot say any more, for I am ready to drop with agitation. But I have the fullest confidence in you: having once secured you a full knowledge of the state of things,

“ Believe me, dear Sir,

“ Yours very faithfully,

“ KATHARINE BRACTON.”

“ P. S. Lest you should feel vexed at the young horse you picked out for me being lent to the black fellow, I must just mention that every other speedy enough happens to be off the farm. I have only just learned that you mean to give him his mouth yourself. I am sure it will make him of tenfold value in my estimation.”

But before Katharine's letter was ready, another, by a much less erudite writer, had been prepared in the hut. John Thomas—who with all his uncouthness, generally managed to recollect the important point at the right time—had reflected,

when about to set off for the horse, that Mr. Hurley, when he procured his liberation from the gang, and the restoration of his ticket, had demanded a promise from him, to the effect that if he should hear of any serious danger threatening Marianna (or even the family at large), thereafter, he would lose not a minute in making him acquainted with it. At once turning back, he sent one of the men after the horse, and summoned another who possessed the art of writing (though in a hand somewhat like the delineations of the coast line on a map), to his own hut, where, after some squabbling between the possessor of knowledge and the possessor of authority, an epistle was indited, sufficiently expressive as to the facts, if it could only be read.

In the course of another half hour "Young Tommy" had been horsed, commissioned, and instructed by each of the authors of the missives as to his duty, and was making rather more speed than he was told to do with the young horse, in the direction of Sydney.

"Me make you go, you young monkey," ejaculated the youth. "What! you go *more* murry make haste? Very well: baal me care: me like

it." Half crazy with delight, the young savage now forgot everything behind him, and only thought, as he dashed along, how far he might venture to push on that day without knocking up his steed, and where there would be the best bit of feed to camp at for the night.

Rachael, also, hastened back to the township, and awaited with a forlorn and throbbing heart the evening of the day; and whatsoever thought could do, or faith in duty enforce, she neglected not, to nerve herself for the hour of sacrifice. On all men's faces,—or on all but the one of a thousand,—she saw mockery of her race expressed too clearly to be mistaken. But it had been for years a growing comfort to her to remark how much the firm rectitude of her father's principles tended to destroy this prejudice in all who knew him. Now this source of comfort was to be transmuted into one of gnawing anguish; for men would only scoff the more at him, at her, at all her nation, by so much as they would become persuaded he had deceived them well. She knew she should see, on a score of faces, every day, the leer of triumph over the hypocrite unmasked, and *he* cold, helpless in his

grave. It was hard to bear; but,—and then the smile glowed forth again, and the tear went back, and the sigh was checked, and almost changed to resignation,—but if the beauteous earth, with lovelier realms of the spirit's own, that are enjoyed unseen, had no dark spot of imperfection, how should we ever submit to think of and prepare for the lovelier, holier realm that lies beyond the tomb?

The gloom of evening came on,—deepened, darkened into night: still the expected knock was watched for in vain. Rain set in, and grew heavier and heavier. Her two servants went to rest, and left her alone in the little parlour. The candle burnt far down; the silence became the silence of midnight: still no signal. At length the first cock crew. Then the thought, the hope, struck her that she might have been made merely the plaything of an impostor, and that the wild tale had only been feigned to extort a boon. Full of this hope, thankful, and relieved of half her anguish, the maiden retired to her couch.

That morning, when Rachael sent the miserable renegade back into the bush, he sauntered leisurely along, and when he had satisfied his hunger, sat down to smoke his pipe. He was three miles down the road from the township, quite secure at

that early hour from the observation of any one likely to question and molest him. He had no suspicion that the gang would pursue him : he supposed they would not discover his absence till morning, and then not surmise why or whither he had withdrawn. But the day would be a longish one, and he must sleep away as much of it as he could : he would have a smoke, and he should need a drink after his pipe ; so he would just have his smoke by the river side, and then go over the range into the first hollow beyond, and find a nice shady tree, and get the day over in the best way he could.

The road along the river side was a sandy one ; a point of the range ran close down to the brink of the channel just ahead of where he sat, obstructing the view almost immediately. His schemes perfected in success, his pipe alight, his hat off, leaning on his elbow, pitching stones into the pool below, he felt that at last "*it would do : a little nob work wasn't such a bad help after all.*" Hark ! — a quick, indistinct, grinding tramp of many feet in the sand ! Nearer—plainer ! Sight as well as sound ! The Black in front, on his strong bony horse, and his glaring eye making

him its focus in an instant: his four mates riding double behind! An instant's check of the horse, a fierce dash in of the spurs, and that stern ebon face was right over him.

"Oh, he's done it," said the Black, turning to the rest of the party, without deigning even to look into his face. "Here's a handkerchief full of grub: a white handkerchief; a regular lady's handkerchief: and, see! look in your hat there, Rooney: he's got it half full of tobacco!"

They didn't talk much: they asked him no questions, and they uttered no imprecations: they spoke in an ordinary tone, but rather a reserved way, among themselves: it was chiefly about the horses being "rather blown" with the double load and the sand, and the speed, and the heat. But in a minute or so, Morgan Brown got down and took the tether rope (there was but *the one* brought) off his horse's neck, and laid his hand on the head of Marcus, and said, "Come, get up on Martin's horse." It was said almost coaxingly: but there was a dreadful significance about it. In vain the captured traitor protested, pleaded, struggled, lied, offered to tell the truth,—to tell all——

"Tell what, man?" cried the Black. "Who's

asking you to tell anything? I'm no scholar, but I can make out that R M that's marked in the corner of that handkerchief; and I know there's none of that sort of tobacco within five miles of here but what's in the Jew's store. Jump up, and don't make a fool of yourself."

They lashed his feet together beneath the horse's belly, and wound the tether-rope over and over his thighs and round his waist, and round by the horse's withers and back, and round and over and over again; they lit a piece of rag from his pipe to light their own, and Beck gave him the snow-white handkerchief with his "grub" in to carry in one hand, and the bridle in the other; and they gave him back his own hat, and had a drink a-piece. Then Beck flung the handful of tobacco far away into the water-hole, and the two stockmen and their mates pushed off back down the road. Beck's horse followed of its own accord, and Beck followed it—followed mile after mile on foot, at equal speed with the horses.

On—on—on, under the burning, cloudless sky, at full trot; then up over the ranges, for a short cut and an untraversed track: but more slowly. Noon; and a rest by a water-hole at the base of

a huge and forlorn hill—one of the portals of mighty ravines, full of trees and shadows and cold air ; sending forth from deepest silence odd musical, mournful notes of birds ; and not a sound besides. And they leave him to rest, and to eat his own meat, and ask him if he has got any tobacco left ; and that he may not have the trouble of rising, Rooney hands him the fire-stick he has just lit his own pipe with.

On again as before : on—on—on, with dislocated system ; all shaking within like hard bones ; all benumbed externally ; with glazed eye and flabby lip, and parched tongue, and a smothering in the breast. And as the shadows stretch out long from the peaks, and in and out of the sunlight through them seems like riding through ghosts, and the air begins to be chill and move and speak of change, he observes that they are following round the top edge of the Basin of Rocks to gain the inlet. By-and-bye, they are back at their haunt again.

“Never mind, my lads,” says the Black ; “he’s been too many for us this once—but that’s all. We’ll have to shift within the hour, or they’ll be on us ; so don’t unsaddle the horses : let ’em

pick a bit ; the poor brutes have had a hard run, and the load 'll be heavy when we start again."

None of them speak to him. All his life is in his ears and eyes : it feels to him as if his ears were drums, and his eyes staring through iron rings. Speak ! he knows not that he even has lips or a tongue : his jaws move, but the sound is inarticulate, like the distant clatter and hum of a little mill—a rattle with a low buzzing moan.

"I suppose we are all agreed," says the Black, as they stand round looking up at him.

For a second or two no one speaks ; some continue to look as they were looking ; some look away. Presently the soldier says, "Justice must be done."

"You hear what's said," announces Beck quietly ; and, cold as contempt itself, he leans back against the rock at the side of the gunyah, folding his arms and slowly throwing one foot over the other ; then, as the action shews him a little tuft of grass tangled in the rowel of his spur, quietly stooping and clearing it, and resuming his position. "We want no revenge on you, my man : you're beneath that. But the man that betrays his com-

rades is a wretch too dangerous to live—a dog that sneaks in and mauls in the dark—a death-snake that steeps his fang in the life-blood, without warning and without pity.”

Again the Black paused, and scanned the faces of his comrades.

“For one man that the lordly lion kills, twice—thrice as many are killed by the devilish snake—a low miserable reptile thing without body or limbs—nothing but a crawling head and tail.”

Again he paused, and began to move impatiently as if he were awaiting a reply:—“Speak, man!” he said at length, throwing himself up with energy, but still with folded arms. “It’s your business to find out if there’s any chance left for you;—ours to see whether it’s a fair one.”

“And yet I must not speak,” thought the wretched being; “it will but aggravate them.”

“Last night at this time,” pursued the Black, almost mournfully, “if we had heard *you* were in the hands of the police, not a man here but would have risked his life freely, if there had been any chance to rescue you—crawler as you ever were. Twelve hours afterwards we catch you

eating and drinking and smoking—*our blood*.
SPEAK, MAN !”

And again, and again, and again : but how changed their tone from the night before ! The echoes of the hills shouted back to him,—“SPEAK, MAN !”

He tried : he threw his head back in insupportable agony ; half way lifted his arm. Some rain came suddenly along on the wind : more ; faster and faster. “Now,” he thought, “there’ll be a change.”

A change ? There was. The Black moved his arm, and, almost ere he did so, Brown came up and loosened the few remaining coils of the tether rope that still hung about his waist ; carried up the end noose ; put one arm through ; put the other through ; got it as high up as his neck—tightened it !

Could it be ? Was he to die ?—to die ! He forgot the wet grass : he felt no horror of abjectness : he would confess the truth—the whole—if they would only let him live. He would go with them to the end of the world.

“*Confess !*” exclaimed the Black, “why he’s mad. After selling *us* to *them* he’d go on now

and sell *them* to *us*: and, by the powers! he thinks that's going to make a man of him! And he'd 'go with us to the end of the world' too—and do the same again as often as he had a chance. No, Marcus! it's my belief, and it's every body's belief here, that you have seen enough of this world, and this world enough of you."

"*Let me live—oh!—let me—let me live!*"

No pity. He is dragged along on his knees—imploring, shrieking, threatening—to where a tree grows close up by the rock, spreading out on one side its boughs upon the grass of the top, and stretching forth on the other a long, massive, horizontal limb. But, though the end of the halter was even tossed over the beam, no man seemed to like to put his hand to it.

Enraged at their indecision, the Black sprang at the barrel of the tree, worked himself up it, and crawled along the boughs on to the grassy ground above. "Up with the end of that rope," he cried; and, turning round, was out of sight in an instant. Soon afterwards, they heard something heavily dashed down upon the top. Half a minute to coil the rope's end round a huge log; a look whether all was clear below; a shove with the foot,—and

the log falls to the ground, and the spy is spinning round and plunging horribly about in the air.

“Be alive, my lads!” exclaimed the Black, returning by a descent beside the gunyah; “load on all the horses can carry. We must push off into mistiful Bud-tha-wong:* we’re not safe an hour longer here. If he has n’t told all *now*, it’s because he’s told it some other time. These have been his journeys by himself, ‘to see one of his ship-mates that was shepherding near the township.’”

Once or twice, as they led the outworn and spiritless animals, now more overloaded than before, towards the outlet from the Basin of Rocks, one and another of the party—Beck alone excepted—turned in the curiosity of horror, and, perhaps, with some emotions of sympathetic anticipation, and looked back at the dismal object. Beck seemed impatient at this: his eye caught every such movement on the very instant. “Come, come!” he cried, “staring at the ghost of the past won’t help the future. The police will do the

* This is a half English, half aboriginal way in which the blacks speak of the mountain; meaning merely “misty Budawong;” from the astonishing intensity of the fog that sometimes prevails in its recesses.

rest for him when they get here : it'll amuse 'em a bit whilst we get ahead."

By this time, the rain, that at first had only swept sparingly along on fitful gusts of the rising wind, was coming, thick and fast, on heavier squalls, but still fitfully. The twilight was almost gone, and the bush all round looked desolate and cold and dim and awful. Great pools spread all over the flats, and the water rushed in little torrents down the gutters of the ranges. They went slipping and plashing along ; their clothes soaked through to the skin ; their eyes blinded by the rain, that drained through their hats : weary, hungry, morose. The horses, even, could scarcely keep their feet : and so the night closed in.

Vainly, indeed, might Rachael sit hour and hour, and await the signal of the miserable renegade : his journeys were at an end !

But there was another who watched late, on that wet, windy night. Till long, long after midnight, Katharine sat and listened to the storm. She felt that to try to sleep would be but a vain endeavour. Mrs. Bracton retired ; her cousin retired : the apprehensions and excitement of all had given way to weariness, or were allayed by hope. But the

more Katharine dwelt upon the subject, the more her heart sank within her. And yet it was not her own share of the jeopardy: not a thought of that remained in her mind. Her dread—her anxiety, was all for that brave heart which, it was now evident, had all along been so loving and so thoughtful of her. She asked herself whether it really *could* be that he loved her, and with that love whose nature it is not to divide itself? She saw that it *could*—it *must* be: for in the increasing light of the broad truth every lesser point became clear and consistent. Then she went into her chamber, and brought that hoarded letter of Mary's, and stirring the fire, sat down and drew up the lamp and read it; pondering over it till she was lost in joy, and thankfulness, and smiles. But then again recurred the sudden harrowing thought, "Possibly the *first* news may reach him and not the *last*; and what more likely than that *now* he may seize the opportunity to prove his sincerity by hastening to assist my uncle: come on here, and meet in mortal struggle with that bold, bad man."

Katharine's religion was not an idea — an hypothesis, merely: it was a reality—a power.

It guided her amidst the visible: it brought her help and comfort from the invisible;—she long had known it was so, and knew it better every day.

“Thou Power Supreme!” she ejaculated, as she meekly knelt and bowed her head, in the full consciousness of human impotence and Divine omnipotence; “in every sorrow Thou hast heard my cry: in every need Thou hast given me help, and hope, and life. Richer joys become my lot each added year of life, till shame oftentimes possesses me to think that I should ever doubt Thy love. Surely I *will not* distrust Thee now, though Thou hast appointed me sorrows as well as joys. Oh, bethink Thee of that noble heart! Let his simple rectitude, his charities, be as memorials before Thee. Protect him! oh, protect him, Merciful Father! from the evil and violent man.

‘Greater art Thou by his side,
‘Than armies of demons against him allied.’”

There was but too much reason for apprehending, from the natural course of events, this dreaded rencontre. Beck looked on his countryman as the immediate cause of his irreparable

downfall and desperate fortunes ; and he was now hastening to hide himself and his followers in the tangled and gloomy mazes of Budawong mountain. That mountain, and Brisbane Water, lie about equi-distant, in opposite directions, from Lupton's inn ; where Reuben Kable always stayed one night in his up-country journeys. It would take about as long for the native lad, well horsed as he was, to get to Brisbane Water, and thence start Reuben on his journey, as it would for Beck and his comrades, travelling heavily as they did, to reach the mountain. And thus the parties would encounter somewhere about the half-way house.

CHAPTER IX.

The Messengers to Broken Bay.—“The Daisy” broken-hearted. — Arrival of the Messengers. — Effect of the Tidings on Reuben and Mary Kable.—Reuben’s Resolve and Departure.

HOUR after hour passed, and still the rain poured down in perfect sheets. Morning came; but no abatement: one of the heavy falls of rain to which the colony is subject, had set in. The cattle all disappeared from low and open tracks, and sought shelter on elevated forest ground. Wherever there was a hollow *there* brawled a torrent: the roads were cut up, the plains swamped, and the greater watercourses filling fast.

The first messenger who had been despatched—Turpin Charles—still continued working his way steadily but slowly forward. No weather could have been better adapted to expedite his journey: there was scarcely a traveller upon the roads.

Young Tommy proceeded still more rapidly; bidding fair to overtake his predecessor before they arrived at their journey’s end. Mr. Hurley,

to whom he was to deliver John Thomas's missive, was not at home ; nor could his servant tell when he would return : it was not improbable that he might be away several days. Tommy knew Mr. Hurley very well ; and he had made sure of some "white money"—the blacks of the interior disdain copper : but now he had no further temptation to linger till he reached Sydney.

Mr. Bracton had not accomplished his project so readily as he expected : the deeds of a farm of twelve hundred and eighty acres were demurred to as a very inadequate guarantee for the payment of nearly as many pounds ; and when Tommy arrived with Marianna's letter, no compromise had been effected. The headstrong young savage had jaded his horse so much, young and fresh as it was at starting, that its owner thought proper to send it to a livery stable. As Tommy knew he must not delay an hour unnecessarily, and that the boats were uncertain conveyances for urgent occasions, he was off betimes next morning, along the coast ; crossing Sydney harbour at the offset, and the waters of Broken Bay later in the day. On his own part, Mr. Bracton, giving his attorney such

final instructions as the case allowed of, hurried to the protection of his family.

To them, but to Mrs. Bracton, in particular, every hour of his absence now seemed a year. Rachael wrote to them that the wretched man whose end has been traced, had not made his appearance; and that she concluded he had been making a last attack upon her credulity and good nature, by a feigned tale: he probably thinking, from her exhortations to him, that his sinecure had drawn to its end. Marianna's fears were thus partly allayed: for she had found Rachael generally right in her opinions; and the very weather itself seemed a protection. But Katharine, who had the safety of some one dearer than herself at stake, scrutinized Rachael's supposition with much more jealousy: to her it seemed possible, but not probable. The man, as Rachael had at first informed them, had come in, prepared to give himself up: had, it seemed, a sound prospect to go upon; and had been induced only at Rachael's urgent request, to defer his determination: did this look like stratagem to obtain a meal and a little tobacco? There was a darkness and mystery about the whole affair that

rather increased than diminished her first dismay. The rain beat in hurricanes against the windows behind ; in front, the creek had overflowed its banks : even their site was not to be made out by the eye : the whole flat, almost across to the opposite mountain, was one bleak, wild, watery waste.

Somewhere about the time when young Tommy got into Sydney, Reuben Kable was steering the sloop through the Heads out into the main, homeward bound. But soon after he got out to sea, the wind seemed not to know what point of the compass to come from ; though still strong and blustering, with a heavy swell on : it then set in so dark all night as to render it indispensable to give the land a wide berth ; and it was not till next evening, some time after sunset, that he brought up alongside his own wharf.

The fire was blazing merrily, and the kettle humming its old, droll, patient song ; and the tea-things were all laid out, and Margaret sitting at her usual occupation of knitting, as he entered, and with some trouble drew off his drenched pilot-coat. But Mary was not there. Of late, it had been often so. Formerly, it had never been ; and

it grieved him to the heart ; for he knew the reason. But he said, for form's sake—and yet almost sternly, as if he thought the old woman had neglected a main duty—

“Where's Mary, Margaret?”

“Oh, honie!” she answered. “I can't keep her. That poor bairn 'll pine herself to death.”

Reuben made no further remark for a minute or so, for his heart strings were twitching in all directions.

“Something must be done with her, honie!” proceeded the old woman. “She doesn't eat as much as would feed a bird. I wish she had never seen Mr. Bracton.”

“Nonsense! He'll come to light in course of time.”

“Then you've not heard anything this trip, again?”

“No.”

“She's been waiting and waiting, and hoping and hoping, ever since you've been away.”

“Where is she?”

“In her own room, bairn ; or else in yours.”

Reuben went out, and after the lapse of some minutes returned with the poor truant. But oh

how wan, and spiritless, and shy ! It was much now that he could have one arm round his waist, by holding it there ; the other held her handkerchief, and her head hung at his side almost like one who was ashamed. The old woman looked not toward them : but she sighed bitterly, and moved herself restlessly, and put down her knitting, and in a bewildered way attempted to mend the fire.

“ I ’ve brought you,” said Reuben, as he seated Mary by the tea-board, and placed his own chair beside her, and leaned over her shoulder and fell into the tone of a parent who tries to divert the attention of a suffering child—“ I ’ve brought you, the silk, and the sarcenet, the cambric, and the calico ; and, let me see, what else ? Sugar, currants, the spices. Oh, and because you are the little queen of housekeepers, a new set of milk dishes—earthenware ones—that you may have to have ‘a skrimmage’ with the old dairyman only every other morning, instead of six times a week, and then give him one in. (You always let him off, I observe, on Sundays): *and* — as to going through the bother of all this marketting, or shopping, or whatever else you may call it, I think I should have been frozen to death, it was so cold,

last night, if it had n't been for thinking of the amends you are going to make me."

The Daisy turned, smiling, at the hint—"There!" she said. "Paid on demand!—and, there—and, there! Every body won't pay you three times what you ask."

"Ah!" said Reuben, "nor will every body give you back what you pay, as I do."

"Come, my lass," said Margaret, cheerful once more, "Your brother must be hungry. Make the tea."

"*Are* you hungry?" inquired the Daisy, anxiously, as she did so.

"Well, I've had nothing since about six o'clock this morning. We made sure of getting in last night, and only brought enough out of Sydney for a couple of meals."

"Oh, that sea—that sea!" exclaimed Mary, mournfully: and again there was a cloud passing over her sun.

The tea-time passed, and the evening sped on; and the old woman—now excessively feeble, and sinking in that rapid and almost sudden way that marks the termination of a sound old age in this climate—retired for the night, and left her foster

children by themselves. Mary listened with deep attention as Reuben exhorted her to patience and hope; for whenever he paused, he kissed her, and drew her to his side like some young dove which has failed and foundered in its first flight, and is tenderly taken up and soothed by kindly forester.

Suddenly a noise from the kitchen, unusual at that time of night, aroused their attention; and Reuben, listening, clearly distinguished a voice he knew very well—that of the strange character we last saw in confidential conversation with Oshee Simons over a half-pint of grog at Mr. Peter Burnes'. The considerate man had really got here before the courier who started after him.

Reuben rose and opened the parlour door just in time to meet old Jemmy, ushering the unexpected messenger from the kitchen. An instant's hope fluttered in Mary's heart that Willoughby had arrived: but in another instant it fled, to join the hundred false hopes that had arisen and been dispelled before.

"You're the same gentleman, I judge," said Turpin Charles, now feeling himself at the truly critical point of his mission, "what was at our farm last year?"

"Well?" said the Australian.

"I judged you was: but you used to wear a shooting-coat then, instead of that there blue jacket. Well, here's a letter as I was to bring down from the ladies: which on 'em wrote it I can't say; but I'm rayther inclined to think its Katharine, because it's writ so reg'lar. Miss Marianna's handwriting's more of a scribble, you know, because she's so quick and dextrous."

"You're an original, Charles," said Reuben, taking the letter. "Oh, it's to my sister! What's the matter? Miss Katharine Bracton's not ill?"

"Well, it's hard to say: we can't make out *what* it is: but the old gentleman's gone off to somewhere, as if—if—if somebody, as I won't mention afore the lady, had kicked him endwise. We can't none on us make it out. There. But you'll see. Katharine?—oh, for that matter *she's* well enough. I've been quite taking notice on her all this week. She's got one of them new gowns of hers on; and when she sports one of them, you know, for the first two or three days, she looks so nice and spruce that its quite fortifying to see her."

"Well, come, you're very wet, I see," said Reuben, laughing; "follow me to the huts, and I'll tell some of 'em to take care of you."

Reuben, proceeding to perform his promise, left Mary to peruse her friend's letter. Its general contents and spirit the reader is already acquainted with. Nor need we avouch the surprise and pain which the tidings occasioned Mary Kable. At his return, Reuben found her full of dismay, and eager to do she knew not what.

"Did *you* know anything about this loan?" she inquired of her brother, at length.

"Not a word. People are not to be expected to tell their family affairs to every one they have a temporary connection with."

"Oh, that I know," rejoined Mary; "only you often *do* know things you don't tell me. My dear Katharine! How good of her to send and let us know. A thousand pounds! What a shocking thing Charles Bracton should have been so foolish! How very unlike Willoughby! is n't it, brother?"

"It really seems as if the troubles of this family would never end!" ejaculated Reuben, rather to himself than replying to his sister.

Mary remained silent; for she feared he was on the brink of expressing his conviction that assistance was all thrown away upon them. She felt anxious to divert his thoughts for a time, lest they

should take that form: but everything she could think of seemed to have a tendency to do the very mischief she dreaded. At length she spoke impulsively, forgetting herself:—

“I’m glad it’s happened.”

“You’re glad it’s happened?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Why?”

“Oh, I know.” Mary meant that Katharine, by insisting that Reuben should be immediately made acquainted with the state of affairs, was virtually acknowledging her belief of his affection, and throwing herself upon it.

The Australian continued to stare at his sister for half a minute, and was then in the act of turning his eyes elsewhere, with somewhat of angry disdain at what seemed so strange and unbecoming a levity, when she threw herself on her knees at his side.

“Reuben, don’t look at me in that way. I do assure you Katharine loves you,—almost adores you:—thinks there is not such another being in existence. I know it. I always knew it, though she would not own it; for you frightened her. You go about in that reserved, independent

way of yours, as if you scorned all sympathy and help."

"If I do, I am not aware of it; and I am sure, if it is so, I am exceedingly sorry."

"But you do: there is no doubt of it. Willoughby says when you go aboard the boat, and he's running her, you take all the command out of his hands directly. He laughed at it, you know: he wasn't angry. But we were talking about your way, and he said (don't be angry; I can't help laughing) he said that one night, when they were got in rather too close to Barrenjueh, and you were coming home with them, and a heavy squall came on suddenly from the eastward, you just went and pushed him on one side and took the helm yourself, the same as if he'd been an apprentice, and began shouting to the hands, and to him just the same as to the rest."

"My dear Polly, it was when Willoughby first began to run the boat. He didn't know the coast like I do. I could see he was looking and pondering what the wind meant; and I knew of old what it meant as soon as I saw the ripple coming. We should have been under water in a couple of minutes more, if I had'nt."

“But you always do so.”

“No, no; I don’t. No man can think more highly of another, as a man and as a seaman, than I do of Willoughby.”

“And, brother, you’ll not let his family be put about now he’s away, for a little money; will you?”

“No, no; by no means.”

“You know he would think it very unkind of me. I’ve got enough lying in the bank without selling any cattle—hav’nt I—to do it myself?”

“There’s no need of your troubling yourself about it, my darling: I’ll attend to it the first thing to-morrow. I’ll go to Sydney: it is there, of course, that Mr. Bracton is; and it shall be settled at once. But tell me, without any more of this nonsense and joking, why Katharine should have, as you suppose, any serious affection for me? Facts, you know; not opinions.”

“First, brother,—*Do you love her?*”

The Australian demurred a few moments. But at last he said, “*I do;*” adding, somewhat hurriedly and impatiently, “Always did, from when I saw her first.” A smile gathered on the face of Mary, as she still knelt at his side.

“ We have your secret,” she said, “ whether you ever get Katharine’s or not. And that is as it ought to be. But——”

Suddenly the dogs were heard in full and fierce clamour at a little distance ; then some one shouting to the residents of the farm to come and call them off. But such occurrences were frequent, and the conversation was again proceeding, when there was a knock at the kitchen door, which once more summoned the cook ; who again, after a minute’s investigation, conducted the individual who had arrived, to the room where Reuben and Mary were sitting.

The young black who entered neither wiped his shoes nor took off his hat ; for he had neither one nor the other to give him so much trouble : but, without at all hurrying to deliver the letter, he lifted up one foot on to the other knee, and after examining it for an instant, said, very composedly, “ Cuss that bush about here ! How I have been cut my toe : all scrub ; not open bush like Morumbidgee.”

“ What !” exclaimed his countryman. “ Young Tommy, I believe, belonging to Diandullah—belonging to Rocky Springs ?”

“Yes :—you my countryman,” replied Tommy, who [having been from his earliest days amongst the white people, spoke a very tolerable imitation of the English language. “I been bring you letter from young missis,” he continued ; a roguish grin passing over his black features, shining and glittering with the wet that still kept streaming down from the ends of his tangled hair, that hung down like a thrum mop. After considerable fumbling, he contrived to untwist a horribly dirty rag from round his belt on the left hip, and unfolding it, produced a piece of paper, which one good shake would have shattered into a dozen pieces.

Reuben spread out the wet and tattered relic upon the table ; but before he attempted to decipher it, he asked—

“Where you come from, to-day, Tommy?”

“Tydney,” said Tommy ; “cobbon me make haste. That Miss Gadarine been say so.”

“Reuben,” said Mary—thinking that the rest might as well be obtained from her friend’s letter, as from the messenger in the presence of old Jemmy, who could not well be told not to wait for the black—“Let Tommy go and get some bullock (beef) and wikki (bread) and pot-o’-tea, whilst you read the

letter. Jemmy let him stop in the kitchen to-night; he's dreadfully wet. I can't think how he came to get here: none of our blacks would travel at this time of night."

"Never me jerran (afraid)," said Tommy. "Most like white man, me. Reuben, you got 'nother shirt? Murry wet, this."

Tommy's travelling dress consisted of a red woollen shirt, a pair of duck trousers, and a belt; and each was thoroughly saturated with wet.

"Go and get him a new red shirt out of the store, Polly," said Reuben.

"Trousers murry wet too, Misser Kable," pleaded Tommy, lifting himself well above the table, that the light might attest his veracity.

"Give him a new pair."

"Come, Tommy," said Mary, taking the candle.

"Yes—yes; I come direcally. Reuben; (countryman you belonging to me.) Never me have a smoke all day, only little bit," he said, showing his empty pipe. And whilst Reuben was searching his pockets for some negrohead, he added, "Misser Bracton been take away my horse in Tydney.

Miss Gadarine been say I must have him ; and Misser Bracton been take him away."

"You couldn't have come any further than Sydney with the horse, if you'd had it, Tommy."

Tommy seemed to recollect, for the first time, that it was so. He had had to cross the harbour at Sydney, and again to cross Broken Bay at Pitt Water (a distance of several miles); in both instances begging a passage, which, by custom, is always given freely to the aborigines, who are supposed to have no money. But Tommy, in his resentment of the injurious treatment of Mr. Bracton, had quite failed to recollect that to be dispossessed of the horse was, after all, no actual disadvantage. Mr. Bracton, who had now begun to manage all such little affairs with plenty of foresight and tact, had also purposely abstained from giving him much money, from a shrewd conjecture what would be the consequence. Whether he gave him any; or how Tommy spent it during the previous evening, if he did; or whether he gave him any tobacco, as the young gentleman has represented that he did not, we do not care to say.

And now Reuben is alone, bending, with eager

eyes, over the torn and obliterated scroll. In the thought that it is *Katharine's*, and *to him*, he almost loses sight of the fact that he cannot decipher it. Again and again his strong and piercing eye is carried rapidly along the clear and intelligible parts, in an effort to infer or imagine the deficiencies. No! Only here and there words meet him such as he is not used to from woman—saving Mary only. Words breathing care—anxious, trembling care—for *him*. And those words are written by *Katharine*. The words bring back the very tones of her voice; he feels as if she were so near that he could turn and speak to her;—an image dim, but angel-like, sweeps through the chambers of his mind.

But again he essays to construct the fragments of thought into a congruous whole. Still in vain. He turns the paper: at all events he can gaze upon the name. But what are these last words? they are legible enough—“*I shall value the horse ten times as much for the touch of your hand.*” “*Ten times!*”—there must be meaning in that, when written by *Katharine*: *Katharine* is no giddy hyberbolist. “Value the horse ten times as much if I break him in. Well,

now, that'll do : that's something like coming to the point. Noble, beautiful Katharine ! Upon my honour, I must have been a tremendous fool—or something worse."

"It's raining, Reuben, as if heaven and earth would come together," said Mary, who now entered, shivering with the damp and chill.

"Here, come and read this letter. Let's hear what you make out from it."

"Read it ? why nobody can read it. What a pity ! What can Katharine have written to *you* for ? Of course, it's something about this loan : perhaps they have thought of asking you to assist them over this difficulty."

"Not a syllable of the sort—the main strain seems to be caution to me that that Black, Beck, that's in the bush somewhere about the Morrum-bidgee and the Snowy Mountains, means to take vengeance, *if he can*, for my bundling him off from the Rocky Springs."

The intimation of such a danger threatening her brother, though he sneered at it, instantly drew Mary's closest scrutiny to the letter.

"Oh ! there's more ; much more than that," at length, said Mary ; who, used to Katharine's

characters and turns of phrase, could both read and understand, and connect the broken sentences in a very different way from her brother. "Here's something about danger to themselves from that man."

"To themselves? From Beck?"

"Yes—and she'll brave it fearlessly for herself: only she is terrified lest he should succeed in some horrible outrage he contemplates upon you."

The next instant Reuben was in the kitchen.

"Tommy, who gave you this letter? But, here; come into the parlour: never mind your supper for a couple of minutes: nobody'll run away with it."

"Brother," exclaimed Mary, as he re-entered with the Black and closed the door—a thing Reuben was rarely very precise about—"Did you see the last lines?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe now?"

"Yes. Tommy, who gave you that letter?"

"Overseer—Welshman."

"What did he say?"

"Only say, *murry, make haste.*"

“What for murry make haste?”

“Oh, that Miss Gadarine want you direcally.”

“Wants me?”

“Yes, yes; *that want you.*” And Tommy first nodded to Reuben in a very serious and significant manner; and then he looked at Mary and nodded in a very waggish and significant manner, just meaning neither more nor less than—“Well, it’s no harm: you know you’re all alike. You can’t do without us.”

“Tommy,” said Mary, too well accustomed to the monkey-like tricks of her aboriginal fellow-countryfolks to be at all annoyed, “Reuben wants to know what you’re sent off here to him in such a hurry for.”

“D—n it,” said Tommy, “I think I been speak plain enough. Miss Gadarine murry frightened, ’cause that old overseer Misser Beck been coming directly along-a-bushranger; and that want, Misser Reuben, my countryman, to come. Woman can’t fight.”

The Australian started up without uttering a syllable, and stood looking uneasily round, like one who in hottest haste knows not where to seek what he wants, or wants something but knows

not what it is, till his eyes fell upon a corner of the room where was a little recess ; then stepping over the chair, and lifting the black by the shoulders out of the way, he brought out that long-barrelled gun that Mary had heard so vaunted of from their childhood upward ; and his face had become, as it always became when he was violently enraged, pale and still as the face of the dead.

“ Stop ! ” he exclaimed, as she began to speak. “ Not a word, as you love me. Tommy, are there any boats lying on this side of the water ? ”

“ Yes ; I been see one there before I come : then ’nother what I come in along-a-gentleman : ’nother coming across. ”

“ Will you go with me—after you ’ve had your supper ? ”

“ Baal — Reuben — that too much rain — me murry tired. ”

“ Stay, then. Polly (don’t look so frightened, silly girl), you must tell the old man (the old man-o’war’s-man) to run the boat this trip. He knows where to load—— ”

“ What are you going to do, brother ? ”

“ I ’m going to take Beck, or else shoot him. ”

As sure as he wears a head, if I can once get on his track, I'll bring him in either alive or dead—one of the two. You know I never was a bush-ranger-hunter, Mary. But now I'll do my whole share at once—ay, and without leaving off till I have done it.”

Hints about rashness; warnings against danger; reminders of the broad, wild, tossing billow that lay betwixt the present hour and the morning's dawn, availed nothing. The only change Mary could effect was, during her brother's temporary absence in his own chamber, to prevail upon Tommy, by an unsparing donation of tobacco, and a new pipe and a glass of rum, to accompany him. Reuben's absence was but for some ten minutes: it was well she seized the opportunity as deftly as she did. Rain, tempest, and murkiest gloom met them as they opened the door to go forth.

“You never can go!” exclaimed Mary.

“Didn't you ask me a while ago, if I believed Katharine loved me? Didn't I say I did? Come, Tommy.”

Three paces from the cottage, and they were lost in the darkness.

CHAPTER X.

Reuben's Journey.—Budawong.—More Plunder.—Beck's loss and threat.—The old Shepherd.—Alarm of the family.—Reuben and Mr. Bracton.—Reuben's Arrival at the Rocky Springs.—His Reception.

THE course of Reuben and his companion was for some miles through the bush : then succeeded a rough and tedious pull across the main waters of Broken Bay for several miles more ; then another track of bush ; and finally, the passage across the harbour of Port Jackson into the city of Sydney.

There are times when all hesitation and (to a certain extent) even caution itself must be thrown aside : when one specific course must be followed out by the best means that present themselves, and no other course so much as thought of : when promptitude is the true prudence. Such an occasion the Australian felt this to be ; and in pursuing his course forward, he spared neither himself nor his barbarian countryman. On he went through thicket and morass ; up the smooth hill-sides and the rocky jump-ups ; conquering his way from

wave and wind ; reckless of the darkness, heedless of the ceaseless pelting of the rain, and its dismal splash hour after hour amongst the leaves ; and regardless of the roar of the torrents.

But Tommy, already jaded with his more voluntary exertions, and wanting his countryman's impulse, could scarcely be induced to keep up till they reached Sydney. As the ferry-boat glided across the harbour, the gray dawn brightened into a sunrise of crimson and gold ; and by the time they had made their way into the central streets of the town, the more active inhabitants, whose duties lay out of doors, were wending to their avocations : the carmen were flocking to the wharfs ; and the sailors' quaint catches, as they stowed or got out their cargoes, met the ear from all quarters of the harbour.

It was evidently impossible to get Tommy any further without "a spell." Reuben, therefore, contented himself with ascertaining that the lad could get his horse again when ready to proceed ; and, leaving him means of providing for his wants in the interim, he pursued his journey alone ; half an hour having sufficed to refresh and mount himself for the road.

It was still early morning, fresh and cool, and the weather had thoroughly taken up. For many miles of the first stages, the roads were sound and good, and the Australian's pace was rapid. Liverpool was speedily reached—the Cow-pasture River crossed—huge Razorback Mountain climbed and descended—Stonequarry passed—and those great far-stretching level avenues that axe and fire have carried through the dense and lonely wildernesses of Bargo, onward to the neat roadside inn, were traversed right up to its well-known door. Here Reuben got a hurried snack, a light of the pipe, and a fresh horse : for only sixty miles were yet travelled.

It was here that Beck was to waylay and avenge himself upon Reuben. The true man, however, had outridden the base. Their motives were diametrically opposite, and their movements correspondently different.

When the heavy weather set in, Beck and his gang found it impossible to urge forward their heavily-laden horses, already tired with a hard day's work : but before the darkness had closed in, and the horses manifested symptoms of knocking up, they had made good some five or six miles. At that point a

dense forest presented itself, at once affording the gang ample concealment and materials for quickly constructing a bark gunyah. They had their tomahawks, and whilst some cut and erected the sapling frame, and kindled the fire against a hollow log, Beck's able arm supplied the roofing ; and in half an hour a tent-hut, large enough to contain them all, stood fronting within a few feet the fast growing blaze. A long dry barrel of timber—an old windfall—lay just in front. The fire, placed against this, soon made its way through the shell and burned cheerily and well sheltered from the rain. With such contentment as such men can feel, the outlaws once more cowered beneath a shelter from the elements ; and, having arranged their stores, proceeded to dry their garments and blankets.

Nor was it till after the lapse of several days, that the rain permitted them to recommence their journey. Reuben Kable was already at Lupton's Inn, when the bushrangers concluded that the fine weather had set in steadily enough for them to venture to pursue their way to the retreat they now contemplated occupying, in the gloomy and savage recesses of Budawong.

This is a mountain distant from the sea something more than twenty miles, as the crow flies. It is very lofty, and the ocean, seen from several of the more elevated parts, seems to flow almost at its base. Broken into a hundred bewildering ravines and pinnacles, and swathed to the very summit with the closest and most magnificent timber, it presents a nest of fastnesses where an army might be placed in ambuscade. It is apparently of volcanic origin, and the richest loam alternates throughout its surface with broken fragments and courses of rock. Numberless streams trickle or rush—as they may be smaller or larger, less or more fed by the weather—down its gullies and ravines, seeking the great reservoirs below. Many of its depths, and indeed many of its hill-sides, are never reached by sunshine; at the depth of its greater abysses the longest summer day consists of but a few of the mid hours; and darksome solitude and weariest silence reign, chequered only by some sudden gush of richest music from the wild bird sunning himself on the highest branches of the trees at noon, or the dolorous howl of the war-regal prowling up and down the creeks at dead of night. Here the outlaws concluded that, with a

little precaution, they might conceal themselves for some time undisturbed. Whatever reprisals Beck might wish to make on his white countrymen, he knew that his first business was to establish himself in his first quarters: revenge must be deferred, at all events, till common security was attained.

Their course to Budawong lay round the back, or coast side of Mr. Bracton's stations. Their first day's journey brought them parallel to the out-stations, at a couple of miles distant, about evening. Here, after the horses were released, and as they sat smoking round their fire in a solitary gulley, a new desire suggested itself to Beck, as a little mob of Mr. Bracton's horses shewed themselves on one of the ridges within sight.

"Soldier," he said, "you could ride well enough without a saddle till we can hear of one for you, and Rooney could learn."

"Better than padding the hoof, lads," cried Morgan eagerly, comprehending Martin's meaning by the direction he was looking in.

"There's an old station where the sheep were before the shepherd found out the big water-

hole," proceeded Beck. "There's never been any sheep there this long time, and one of the ends of the yard is broken down: we could easily run that mob of horses into the yard, and catch a couple. What do you say?"

All hands immediately pronounced it "the only thing to be done." Just enough light remained to accomplish it; and, leaving Warraghi to take care of the stores, the rest of them immediately began to direct the course of the little mob of seven or eight horses towards the old station. On arriving within sight of the hut, however, an unforeseen obstacle presented itself: smoke was arising from the chimney; the ruinous state of the station had disappeared, and the tinkling of a sheep-bell from the yard proclaimed that the ground was again occupied and a flock folded within the fence. For an instant it seemed that the project was a futile one; but the gang were now too reckless to yield to anything less than inevitable disappointment; and, after a consultation, they determined to go to the hut, and, making their purpose plainly known, compel the shepherd to turn the flock out. The shepherd proved to be already gone off to one of the neigh-

bouring stations ; but the hut-keeper was one of the old hands belonging to the farm, and consequently a man whom Beck knew well. He was, moreover, one of the lowest characters ; capable of taking whichever side suited him for the time ; and soon gave the gang to understand that they might do as they pleased for anything he cared : he would offer no impediment. The sheep were, therefore, quickly out, the gateway widened into a large breach, and the horses headed in.

The shepherd had gone off for several hours ; the station was far out of every line of common traffic ; and no disturbance was to be expected for the rest of the evening. When the horses were secured with a couple of halters made out of a tether-rope, a general gathering into the hut to light the pipes followed. And now, as his mates smoked, Beck's curiosity was excited to learn how things went on at the farm ; and to ascertain whether Reuben Kable was still expected to visit the Rocky Springs, and what, in common opinion, was the real object of his visit. Finally, he wished to make sure exactly what the wretched man, whose fate has been described, had

said at the township, and what steps consequent thereon had been taken by the police.

“Well, Liar,” said Beck to the hutkeeper—whom he was merely addressing by his common appellation, “what sort of an overseer does the Welshman make?”

“Oh, well enough,” responded the individual questioned.

“You don’t mean to say he gives you better weight in rations than I did?”

“No, you used to give the best weight, Martin.”

“Well, does he work you any easier?”

“No:—has the yards cleaned out every day.”

“Did I use to take you to court, then?—or how is it he’s such a chop?”

“Oh, he’s not much of a chop, I must say: ever so many about the farm wishes you was back again.”

“Ha! but this swell overseer’s coming to see you again; is n’t he?”

“Who’s that? What, Mr. Kable? Oh, very like: I think he is: I heard say so. Some of ’em says he’s only coming a courting; and others says he’s going to buy the farm.”

"Which same," added Beck, half ejaculatory, "is one and the same thing."

"So I should say," remarked Brown; "and then we'll have a nice neighbour."

"All's not lost that's in danger," said the Black, at the same instant unconsciously putting his hand to the pocket in which he always carried the tin-case, in which bushmen are in the habit of securing their money and any papers of value. But no sooner had he done so than he sprang hastily up from where he was sitting, and searched more and yet more carefully, with increasing perplexity and dismay marked on his countenance and features.

"Lost anything, Martin?" asked Brown.

"My box! Why, man, you don't know what you're laughing about. If I can't get a chance of getting my money out of the bank *now*, I could if ever I was in custody: and that box contains all I've got to prove my title to it."

"Oh," said the stockman, "I thought all that was only as good as waste paper now."

In vain was the search pursued, and as vainly did Beck endeavour to recollect any probable occasion when he could have dropped the tin case;

which in reality contained his only means of securing legal assistance in the last emergency. All he could be sure of was, that he had never had it in his hand since the day on which they had removed from the Basin of Rocks. When the desertion of their comrade was first discovered, during the night previously to his capture, he had felt for his treasure, fearful that it might be among the stolen articles, and had found it safe; and the most probable thing he could now suppose was, that, having replaced it too carelessly in his pocket, it had jerked out during that journey: but its value to him, in case everything else should fail, was such, that he at once concluded it would be better to track back every step of the ground they had come since; and, if still unsuccessful, even every mile of that day's journey, than give up the hope of repossessing himself of it. But it was now too dark to undertake such a task that night; and he had no alternative but to subdue his impatience till fresh daylight began to break.

In vain his comrades, now become far too serious for jesting in the presence and beneath the spell of his passion, sympathized with him. In vain he himself recollected the uselessness of

everything but the efforts involved in the attempt of recovery. Ten times more easily would he have borne to be placed in the most imminent danger of losing his life. Whilst the more the subject took possession of his thoughts, the more definitely did they insist upon putting forward Reuben Kable as the author of the whole mischief, done and impending. With all the fierce profanity of phrase of one who casts off the last check upon his vindictiveness, he went on vowing vengeance upon the head of his adversary; forgetful alike of the rapidly passing hours, and of the probability of the shepherd's return. The hutkeeper began to feel alarmed, lest his mate should make his appearance and detect him in the falsehood he meant to tell about the breach of the fence, and possibly the absence of some of the sheep through their untimely disturbance. At length, however, the suggestion of one of his own comrades, that Warraghi would be alarmed at their absence, and, perhaps, conclude they were captured and abandon his post, aroused Beck to a sense of what was necessary, and he rose to depart.

"True," he said "*action is everything.* We may be too late to catch the Broken Bay swell on

the road up, but we shall not be too late to call at the Rocky Springs as we go by, and leave a little token for him." And taking hold of a pair of sheep shears which lay upon the little back table, he held them at about the height of a person's head, and quaintly shadowed forth his meaning: but that was all. Flinging them down the same instant, he led the way from the hut.

They were now all supplied with horses, and it was agreed that, dividing the loads as equally as possible, the four subordinate members of the gang should proceed on toward Budawong; whilst Beck, detaching himself for the time, should remain at liberty to pursue his search as thoroughly and effectively as he pleased.

Scarcely had the outlaws departed from the hut when another man presented himself at it. This was the old shepherd himself, who had approached some little time before they went, and, listening at the back of the hut, had heard the whole of the latter part of their conversation. Fortunately for the hutkeeper, he had said nothing implicating himself during that brief period, but had merely made remarks urging them to go away. The shepherd was a man of the better

stamp, and far advanced in years, but hale as if yet at the meridian of life. Although of the convict class formally, he had undergone no assimilation to it in essential character. He was one of the order of persons who have singularly little natural bias towards low vices; and would never have been a thief at all, but for what we cannot help calling a necessity of social position. Amidst the solitudes where he had expiated his brief error, his mind had easily and quickly betaken itself to its original and predominating habits, and nothing had since deranged them: and he was now for some years a free man.

Although he knew the robbery of the horses ought to be immediately reported, he still knew it was not desirable to send the hutkeeper in at that late hour about it. He further comprehended that Beck gave up all thought of immediately assailing Mr. Kable: but the vagueness and yet bitterness of the latter part of Beck's final exclamation arrested his consideration. After a few moments he inquired of the hutkeeper,—

“What was it Beck meant to say as he was going away? I heard him snipping the shears, I thought.”

“Oh, that you may guess easy enough,” said the hutkeeper, laughing vulgarly. “He means he’ll go and cut their hair off—the two young ones, you know;—no, I should think only Katharine, and make a little *croppy* of her. What odds? Don’t the free people serve out the women that get lagged that way too?”

“Does he, bedad!” exclaimed the old man, as his long silvery eyebrows knit themselves suddenly into tangles, and he started again to his feet. Within the space of two minutes more, his old monkey jacket was buttoned around him, and he on his way to the farm. It might be that he had a daughter of his own; also some sweet-faced, hazel-eyed girl, with nut-brown hair, in lands beyond the sea. Often, very often indeed, some such single great fact lies at the fountain head of a countless host of lesser sympathies.

The journey was a long one,—well nigh five-and-twenty miles. The old man got into the farm before daybreak, but waited till the ladies arose to put them in possession of what he had heard. Once or twice he doubted whether he was not making too much of it; or perhaps a natural delicacy of sentiment rendered the duty of

making the communication an irksome and difficult task.

Katharine's face flushed till the old man cast his eyes down, as he told the rascally menace, and her heart sank within her. Marianna, though not unflurried, listened to it indignantly. Whilst the old man apologized for reporting it, he yet ventured to say "he hoped they wouldn't neglect it. They knew what Beck was when he was *up*. If he should not find his money, he would rage like a wild beast." And so both Mrs. Bracton, and Katharine, and Marianna themselves thought. But so common an occurrence was it for bush-rangers to threaten and not perform, that they felt sure that its reportal to the police would secure them nothing beyond a useless, temporary visit. For who could tell what time Beck might select for fulfilling his threat?

A messenger, however, was despatched to the police-station at Ghiagong : for it was considered that, by informing the police where the gang had been at so late a period, and what robbery they had committed, possibly their track might be run down till they were overtaken. But, after all, this seemed to leave the family with a very inadequate

sense of security: as to the hands on the farm, amongst them there were so many craven spirits, that they were not to be depended on.

The messenger, as usual, bore with him a billet to Rachael. In that Marianna affected to make light of the threat: but nothing approaching to *proof* that such was her real feeling could have been detected in it. It had the effect of bringing Rachael to the noontide board at the cottage: and now, once more clustering around it, each with a more thoughtful and anxious heart than she revealed, they could only hope, and hope, and hope that the purposes of the Great Teacher with them in these perilous and harrowing visitations would ere long be completed, and a period of repose arrive.

And, at all events, whatsoever the energy of one strong, human spirit could do, was being done. Reuben was pressing on with all that directness of aim and steadiness of will which so strongly individualized his character. His fresh horse, from Lupton's, a dashing, full-grown animal, of good blood and bone, and well in flesh, left Mittagong behind, almost without turning a hair; and then Bong-Bong; still nearly in as good wind

and spirits as when he started. Just when the afternoon sun began sensibly to decline, the young Australian encountered a traveller whom he had anticipated meeting, and feared to have met with before: it was Mr. Bracton, walking his horse; which was almost knocked up with the weight of its rider and the unusual pace it had been put to during the two days. To Mr. Bracton himself the appearance of the native was equally unexpected and welcome; for he was travelling with as heavy a heart as he had ever known. Difficulties and losses, annoyance and suffering, seemed to have been thickening around him from year to year, now for so many years; and even increasing the more he struggled to subdue them; that this present suspense as to the safety of his family seemed quite to extinguish hope. All he had to cheer him was that, as yet, no one whom he had met travelling downward, from the vicinity of Ghiagong, had heard of any fresh outrage by the gang.

“I am sure, sir,” said Reuben, after he had controlled himself through a hurried greeting and avowal of his destination, “you will not require from me on this occasion any very exact apology;

for I may say at once that I shall ride on and leave you. Candour on my part, and the facts of the case will, I feel quite satisfied, convince your own good sense that I am doing right. I shall not dismount, except to eat and change my horse, till I get to your house. Of course, I must have some more than ordinary motive: it is this—I am informed that that scoundrel Beck is threatening your whole family; and to ensure the safety of any one of them, I would make a pretty rough dash to settle that villain. But I have long had the very highest opinion of Miss Katharine; and when she is in danger, I choose, as a simple matter of taste, just to take the thing up once for all. I mean either to have the rascal safe in one of her Majesty's gaols, or else disable him from committing any more of his devilment: he has been at it quite long enough."

A beam of light fallen upon his path from on high could scarcely have gladdened him on whose ears these words fell, more than did that frank and welcome avowal.

"I shall ride on, sir," Reuben finally said, "and carry before you, by as many hours as I can, your affectionate remembrances to the ladies. Good-evening."

And again the clatter of the hoofs of that tall, dark, bay horse was heard becoming more and more distant on the forward road. Mr. Bracton watched the compact and fast departing mass as long as it was in sight, but the rider's head turned not again. Once more night came on, and once more the native neared one of the larger settlements. Here again the well-stocked horse-paddock of a friendly fellow countryman furnished him with a steed. And again he dashed on, across those magnificent open pastures, and along by craggy hill-side and over far-stretching forest, and through creek and river, for the now proximate Morrumbidgee. And as the night sank down, so rose the day; save that twice or thrice through the long, lone hours, the noble and willing animal, ever from earliest yore the comrade of man in valorous enterprizes, obtained a few minutes' pause and breathing time, whilst the pipe was filled and lit, and a few cheering words and touches of caress bestowed.

Severe and cold, and far different from the genial mornings of Broken Bay, appeared the daybreak of the south-western interior, as the well-nigh worn-out steed and his almost slumber-

ing rider traversed the latter part of their course. At length, Ghiagong, and the park-like forest, and the mountain—"Another mile, good Hector, and then rest as long as you will."

The dinner hour passed at the cottage as we have described. An hour afterwards Mrs. Bracton sat by her work-table, silent, musing: lost, perchance, in one of those reveries of affection which a heavenly law prolongs to the old age of virtue. Miss Bracton, within her own apartment, listened, far more patiently and consentingly than she once had done, to the correct and faithful counsels of Rachael. Katharine, afraid any longer to venture to the hill-top, stands for the time half-forgotten of sadder things, inhaling the odour of the jessamine vine, and admiring the glorious spangled beauty it has put on with these two days' sunshine after the rains. And every now and then, as it again and again recurs to her who may some day come—some four or five days hence perchance—even so soon as that!—riding free, fearless, and firm, round yonder hill point—her glance unconsciously wanders towards it.

"Why, he is there!—now!—Can it be?—Himself!—no other."

And the quick eye of the bushman sees her too; and he waves his hand; and suddenly his horse tosses up his head, hanging so heavily before, and passes into a trot.

Trembling as she had never trembled before, Katharine hurried in, and told in broken exclamations, and as much by gestures as by words, whom she had seen and how near he was. Marianna, Rachael, and Mrs. Bracton, all hastened out to the front verandah. The traveller rode up as their eager hands contended which should open to him the garden-gate. It was not without an effort that the Australian came down from his horse; not without an effort, seemingly, that the overdone horse checked himself and stood still with his chest against the fence, then hung his head beyond it. His rider, as he relinquished the bridle, staggered before he could stand; so that the ladies looked inquiringly and astonished into his face. Reuben laughed: but it was not very merrily.

“It’s not *too much*, ladies, but *too little* that’s to be blamed. I assure you, I am just as hungry as ever I was in my life; and as tired.”

"Where did you meet our messenger, then? The black boy I mean," said Marianna.

"At Brisbane Water."

"At Brisbane Water?"

"Yes. I rode all last night, and walked or ran, or something of the sort, the night before."

"Mr. Kable!"

"But where is Miss Katharine?"

"She was here just now." Reuben knew that.

"Well?"

"Oh, yes; quite well."

"Beck has not yet made his appearance?"

"No! only we hear of more threats. But come in: we can tell you nothing till you are refreshed."

"Mr. Bracton will be here in a few hours: he sends his remembrances. I'll just take my horse round to the stable, Marianna."

"You'll just *not*, Mr. Kable. The stableman can be called: the stable-door's open. Come, give mama one arm and Rachael the other, and I'll see that your horse is looked to."

Trembling as she had never trembled before, Katharine had told her tidings;—trembling as she had never trembled before, she passed from room to room; struggled to compose herself; turned

away from the mirror, shocked at her own discomposure; listened; heard the horse's hoofs at the very gate of the garden, saw the moment they all made towards it; and then snatched down her bonnet and shawl, and disappeared.

A couple of minutes passed after Reuben sat down, and there was no addition to his entertainers. Marianna had returned. Rachael had told the main matters of importance—only she omitted to say what specific form the last menace of the Black came in. Mrs. Bracton's voice and step were heard alternately in the kitchen and passages; the plates began to clatter: still no Katharine. Doubtful, still, how he must construe her absence, Reuben at last yielded to the painfulness of his anxiety, and inquired,—

“Your cousin is very busy to-day, Marianna?”

“Oh dear, no!” And Marianna and Rachael involuntarily glanced at each other, and smiled. Reuben saw it.

“Only, because I am come, she goes away?” said Reuben, smiling too.

A pause followed. Rachael could say nothing; Marianna would say nothing. It was the very question itself.

“By such a token,” said Reuben, “one would say I must be much in favour—esteemed (perhaps she is dressing); or very much out of favour—*hated*.”

And that last word signified what too deeply concerned him, to be uttered with any less than the emphasis which told his whole meaning instantly. Marianna turned, and the piercing glances of the two rested for an instant steadily upon each other : and then Miss Bracton went and sat down at his side, and offered him her hand.

“Now, Reuben, tell me honestly—it’s a shame to trouble you, so knocked up as you are ; but it’s best—Do you *really love* Katharine?”

“Above every human being, Marianna. I think her everything ——”

“Oh, of course. But *you* needn’t tell *us*. We know exactly what Katharine is.”

“Well, well, Marianna ; but——”

“No, no : stop a minute. You may tell Kate by-and-bye that I say I’m quite positive about her being in love herself—*quite* : and that as there seems to be nobody else making any pretensions, I think she had better confer a favour and a pleasure on us all by accepting *you*. Can you com-

prehend? Poor fellow! Pray look at him, Rachael! What is it I must have been saying to him?"

"Marianna! Marianna!" exclaimed Rachael, reddening and laughing, and running away; "what a strange girl you are!"

"Another word, Mr. Kable," added Marianna. "Kate has evidently marched off in a fit of irrepressible fidgets to the top of the hill. You'd better follow—if *you can*. But the dinner's coming in this very instant: mind that. After such a journey, let us all leave you in peace to discuss it. Good-bye for the present."

"Stop, stop, Marianna. Do you think I can let Katharine stay there? It's getting quite cold."

"We'll send for her."

"No, no," said the Australian; "I'll go myself. You know how chary I am of the labour of working people. Good-bye *to you*, Miss Bracton."

CHAPTER XI.

Reuben and Katharine.—Beck's Night and Day alone.—What Dubbo saw.—Beck overtaken by Reuben.—Beck alone with the Dead.—The Struggle.—Escape of Beck.—Re-pursuit.—Night in Budawong.—Outlaws' Camp.—The Fight.—Flight.—Reconciliation of Marianna and Mr. Hurley.

It was evident, by the pace at which the Australian went up the hill, that he was thinking of meeting with the young lady on the level of the ridge-top rather than on the steep descent;—a manifestation of good sense, and worthy of a bushman. Another minute, however, and he would have been too late. Katharine had subdued the whirlwind of her thoughts, and stood a few paces off, on the top of the hill, adjusting her shawl, when the tall form and joyful countenance of the bushman came bounding up towards her. A start, and a tremble, and a blush.

“Oh! Mr. Kable,” exclaimed Katharine, clasping her hands, and looking from behind them as if she were never to look again; “how you have startled me!” The setting sun shone

full upon her face; and it looked neither more nor less than the frail material veil through which could be seen all the loveliness of one of the loveliest spirits that ever glided along the fields of time to a celestial home.

“Dear Katharine!” said the Australian; “come and talk with me for one minute. Take my arm. Katharine,—this many, and many, and many a day I have loved you more than words can tell.” And he bent forward, and looked into her face. “Will you be my wife? Ah, I see you will. Dear, beautiful Katharine!”

“I am so surprised to see you at all, Mr. Kable, that I can hardly collect myself. There is a letter gone on for you to Brisbane Water. But it’s all well: you are safe.”

“Is this the letter? You see it just as my countryman delivered it. Tell me its contents yourself: it is impossible to read it.”

“Oh, it is all well now, since you have arrived safe. But that man has become such a ruthless desperado, and his threats are becoming so shocking——”

“I hear he is threatening you all again, more bitterly than ever.”

“No, not mama ; only Marianna and me.”

“And why you two only ?”

“Oh, I suppose, because,” said Katharine, colouring again at the thought, “he thinks it wouldn’t so much annoy mama.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Hasn’t Marianna told you what he said?”

“No.”

Katharine stammered out the short but difficult explanation. “He says he ’ll shear off our hair—and make croppies of us.”

The Australian stopped short, as if a gulf had opened at his feet,—so short, that his companion could not but turn to look at him. But he recovered himself instantly.

“If he did, I suppose it would grow again. But if I serve his *head* the same way, *that won’t*,” said the bushman: “and that, or something like that, is the very next thing I mean to do. Dear Katharine ! of course you only laugh at it : there is no occasion for fearing *him* any more. I ’ll not leave these premises till I ascertain from the blacks where he has been within a few hours before ; and then he must be a luckier fellow than I ever met with yet, if I don’t run his track down

till I've caught him. He's at the length of his tether, now."

"Not, I hope, without sufficient protection for yourself?"

"Protection! Why that Warraghi, and Brown as well, are two as great curs as ever lived. But come; to tell you the truth, I'm fasting some hours. Now it's settled, you know, Beautiful! Peerless! you belong to me. No answer?—Katharine!"

"Yes, Reuben; and ever did."

At the cottage was a hutkeeper from a second station, who came in to say that he had seen the Black, sometime after noon, alone, traversing the bush slowly but steadily toward a lower part of the river, with his eyes fixed on the ground, as if intent on finding something. With this addition to the old shepherd's information, Reuben no longer hesitated what course to pursue; but determined to require the presence of the police at the cottage for a given time—namely, till Mr. Bracton's arrival, and follow Beck's track himself.

Since Mr. Hurley's departure, Mr. Bracton, although senior magistrate, had taken but little share

in the business of the bench; leaving it, in all ordinary matters, to Major Jennings, and occupying himself almost exclusively with the business of his farm and stations. As senior magistrate, however, it was competent to him, if he pleased, to assume the direction of the police; and on such an emergency as the present it was indubitable that he would do so. It was only necessary for Reuben, therefore, to make a peremptory demand upon the corporal in the interim: accordingly a man was immediately sent to the township with such a document. It was too late to do anything that night; and, as Beck also must stop when light failed, the delay would not change the relative position of the pursued and the pursuer.

And now the excitement seemed even worse to the family than the suspense and terror had been. In vain the altered aspect of affairs was recurred to; in vain it was again and again suggested how near to home Mr. Bracton must be by to-night; in vain they coned over and over—each in silence, and each in thankfulness as continuous as hersilence—the few clear words in which Reuben had told them the sum of the consultation between Mary

and himself about the bills : all would not dispel the dread of that which was to come. Nor, if that could have been lost sight of, would all even then have been well. Reuben could not but acknowledge that Mary's heart seemed breaking ; nor could they divest themselves of a share in the apprehensions. Nothing was said about Mr. Hurley : Charles's name was so mentioned, too, that Reuben could not but feel impressed that with him also something had gone wrong. Wearied as he was, and pressed to retire to rest (though he had not mentioned that the night previous to that on which he started, was passed only with such broken sleep as one can take on the open deck of a small boat tossed on a rolling sea), he yet lingered amidst the group : lovely they all were, and sorrowful ; but the loveliest of them all, as ever and anon her eyes met his, and she thought what might come to pass by that hour on the morrow, was more than the most sorrowful of them all. Her sorrow was of another order.

Such hours and such subjects bring out all the individuality of womanhood ; and the caress of hearts has a magic of its own, transcendent and inscrutable. Could Reuben's thoughts have been

circumscribed to that one room, it would have been to him the evening of some eastern dream. And often may we remark the spirit thus trained and prepared, by one extreme of sentiment, for throwing all its energies into the opposite.

And the spirit of a feud was brewing elsewhere, fit to afford scope to such a transition. All along, Beck's shrewd mind had kept in sight the point, that, till conviction, his money was his own—positively as much so as if actually in his own hands; only, under present circumstances, difficult to obtain. But if ever he came to be captured, that instant the difficulty vanished. Well he knew, moreover, what could be effected under such circumstances, in Sydney, by money. And he re-traversed every step of the way they had come with the unwavering vigilance of a hungry bloodhound on the track. When he gave over at night, he had gone but half the way to the Basin of Rocks; but he felt that he could find no fault with himself. He could say that if the object of his search had been on his course, he must have seen it.

Whilst his mind was occupied with the business of the day, he had forgotten everything beside;

but when he came to encounter the hours of darkness—sleep flying from his eyes; the hard cold earth beneath him; the bright, stern stars above; the empty bush around, yielding neither home nor help, nor so much as matter for the creation of a hope: when he thought of the long years of hardship and toil he had struggled through, and how their hoarded equivalent had come first to next to nothing, and then (it seemed but too likely) entirely to nothing: when he thought of the change that a few months had made, and how it all came about, and whose hand had touched the mainspring that wrought the change—it seemed to him that he had a right to exact a commensurate retribution. He had never molested Kable. On what ground, then, was he molested by him? Reuben Kable might prepare for whatever retaliation came readiest—on his person—on his property—on his friends—on his life. Why not? Would Kable spare *his*? What he was so forward to give, let him be content to take.

Before the stars were off the sky Beck was a-foot again, and as soon as it was light enough for the purpose again intent upon his search.

But though he turned each larger tuft of grass, and retrod with closer carefulness every patch of stony ground, and searched all round about every spot where they had paused a while, overthrew the tent-hut, nay, raked the ashes of the fire again and again, 't was all in vain—mere labour lost. And now only the little space remained between the tent-hut and the Basin of Rocks. Should he go on thither? Was that ghastly object still hanging there, or had the police removed it? It would be nigh nightfall, if not quite, before he got there; for he was leading his horse throughout. If the police had been there, the ghastly thing would be gone—buried out of sight, no doubt; if they had not, there would be himself and the horse: he should not be alone. Once more he set forward.

That same afternoon Dubbo had ridden round that way. Some of his cattle ran at times over to the tops of the loftier hills above, along a leading ridge; and, as he had seen nothing of Warraghi for some days, he looked from a high point that commanded a view of the Basin, down at the spot whence the smoke usually curled up. There was none. By-and-bye, being lower down on the

hills, he took a fancy to ride a little nearer still to the edge of the basin. Still no smoke; and, though he listened long, no sound. At length he rode quite down to the brink near the Ghibber Gunyah. There, close under his horse's head, through the branches of a tree, he saw, swaying heavily to and fro, though still as death in itself, a strange, unaccountable, hideous thing, like a man. Moving further on beside the tree-head, he needed to look but once to know what and who it was. With colourless cheek, and trembling hand, and crawling flesh, he turned his horse's head, and pursued his way toward his hut. From that day forward he was an altered man.

The police, meanwhile, had arrived early in the day at the Rocky Springs, and Reuben had started. When the ladies met him at the breakfast-table in the morning, they imagined he had entirely dismissed his determination of the day before: Katharine herself imagined he had, till she had contemplated him for some time. His look and manner, nevertheless, were not those of one who had shrunk from a project, but rather of him who has entirely forgotten one. When the troopers arrived, however, soon after breakfast, off at once came the

braces, and on went the narrow dark strap round the loins, just over the hips—an infallible indication in the bushman of intended physical exertion. In ten minutes from that time, with just as much food as he could carry in his jacket-pocket, and his piece carefully charged with a single ball, the Australian was nearly out of sight.

About noon, the hutkeeper who had seen Beck on the day before, pointed out the track. As there was the horse's track as well as the man's, a far less vigilant eye than the native's could have kept it at any speed. First he came to the spot where the outlaw lay and ruminated during the night—the ashes still hot, the disturbed surface, the flattened grass in a little swamp beside, where the horse had slept. As he proceeded, there were still surer marks—for it was a lonelier region, where not so much as a single flock of sheep had wandered since the three horses passed first in the opposite direction; their footmarks, imprinted immediately after the rain, could be kept at full stride. So it continued right forward to the tent-hut, in close forest ground, where the gang had camped during the rains. Here he must have been close on Beck's heels; for the light dust of the

wood ashes that had been thrown up into the air by the Black, in raking them about in the last hopelessness of his search, still lay, unswept by any intervening breeze, upon the leaves of some stunted bushes, half-scorched, that grew within a few feet. The last few miles were the most difficult of the whole: the rains had effaced all the tracks but those of Beck that day, and the sun, now very low and shining aslant through the trees, dazzled and perplexed. Several times the Australian got quite off the track, and had to return and start afresh from some sure point. At length the track entered a scrub covering the point of a hill: the horseman evidently had passed but a very short time before; for the branches of the saplings that had been forced against each other were even yet here and there clinging to one another.

Moving now cautiously and silently, he heard, before he got clear of the thicket, the snort of a horse. Pausing till he was sure he had not yet attracted attention, Reuben once more glided on betwixt the branches. Suddenly he found himself looking through the dense foliage into a great hollow, surrounded by rocks. All seemed still as the grave within it: presently there came again the

peculiar snort of a horse feeding, and in the next instant the sound of it shaking itself in full equipment of saddle and bridle ; the animal was evidently on the same level with himself. He was, however, instantly certain, upon looking into the hollow, that this must be the spot Rachael had spoken of as having been described to her by the renegade bushranger. Leaning cautiously forward, the next glance displayed to him the suspended corpse, and Beck sitting on a log opposite to it at some distance ; his hands resting on the muzzle of his piece ; his eyes intently riveted upon the ghastly shape ; his hat off, and his whole frame perfectly motionless. Hopping about on the edge of the rock, behind the branches of the tree, was a complete flock of carrion birds : the hawks close to the tree, and venturing openly out, and up into the top limbs ; the crows, either intimidated by Beck's presence, or awed by the fiercer birds, farther off among the underwood. The state of the relic of humanity told that they were no new-comers. Presently, a young hawk rose, and sweeping round in the air till he had gauged his distance, swooped down upon the shoulder of the torn and tattered mass. Up rose

Beck : to his shoulder went his gun : before the eye could see its pause, the flash and the crack followed ; and down with a shriek came the bird of prey, tearing and tossing about on the ground for half a minute ; and then collecting himself, he found his legs, and stretched his neck, and erected himself, and ruffled his feathers, and facing the Black defied him. Beck sprang forward—

“ Wretch ! beast ! devil ! was man made for you to prey upon ? ” he shouted, as the indomitable bird flew at his legs ; and he beat him to death with the butt-end of his piece.

Leaving the hawk to his last struggles, the Black turned and retraced his way to the log ; and again he rested his hands on the muzzle of his piece, and assumed his motionless attitude. Then, as if suddenly recollecting that the discharge of the other barrel would leave him defenceless, he arose hastily, charged it, and sat down again, as before.

Twilight began to come on : yet still Beck kept his post. The white Australian knew not what to do. First, he wondered what could be the history of the dark, dismal spectacle he saw. Was the

man a self-murderer? It looked like it, by the way in which he hung. It looked as if he had reared up the heavy log, and fastening one end of the rope round it, and the other round his own neck, then let the log fall, and thus been drawn up. The manifestation of human feeling made by Beck; the sense that he was in a manner the victim of circumstances; the recollection that he was his countryman, a bold and hardy bushman; that he himself had provoked Beck's threats by the first attack, next came crowding all at once upon Reuben. He felt that he could not shoot a man in cold blood: especially one performing an office of humanity.

Only one other course appeared practicable; for Reuben remained as resolved as ever not to lose the opportunity of putting an end to the Black's career of depredation, and of securing Katharine and her friends from his violence. He saw there was an entrance to the Basin by the gorge, a little lower to the right: and Beck's back was towards it. If he could reach him unobserved, and throw himself

on him — No! If he failed, Beck would undoubtedly fire, and he had both barrels charged. The only other plan whatsoever was to depend on reaching him unheard, and stunning him with a single blow.

In motion once more, the white man could only with difficulty control his pace sufficiently to conceal from the quick ear of the Black his advance round, through the bush, to the mouth of the hollow. At length, his way made good so far, he steps lightly and quickly forward. The moon now adding its mellow light largely to that of the departed sun, in a few minutes more, the last, laggard bird will have ceased for the night his attempt to reach the prey; and Beck will cease his vigil. A little, raised, grassy tract leads right along by the very log he is sitting on. Step by step on tiptoe—at every few paces just an instant's pause, to make sure that the Black is not moving—the careful concentration of the powers of vision, to maintain the consciousness of the exact distance—the last pause—the poise of the piece—the spring—ha! their pieces meet in the air. The Black's is smashed at the breech, and the white man's lock is gone.

Grimly for an instant they stood face to face : then Reuben, dashing over the log, seizes the Black by the collar ; who, on his part, clutching the neck-cloth of his antagonist, strikes with his right hand. The white man is getting the worst of it. But it is only for an instant : longest in the reach, Reuben lowers his grasp to the swell of the Black's chest and holds him out at arm's length. The Black wrings the neckerchief round till his assailant is choking ; but Reuben has borne him backwards to the tree, and forces him against it and overbalances him, and over both go headlong ; the Black letting go his grip in the sudden endeavour to save himself. For an instant only, both are free : in that instant, the white man is trying to untie his neckerchief. The Black, not seeing or not heeding this, has rushed upon him and seized him in his arms, and is carrying him towards the upturned root of the log, where a number of sharp horns stand out. But he is dealing with as apt a bushman as himself. Reuben is instantly conscious of his design ; and burying his right hand in the Black's woolly hair, and seizing his chin with his left, he twists his adversary's head almost round : the Black staggers, and after

a vain struggle for an instant, again falls. On the ground the struggle is renewed; the Black hasty and furious, the white man cool and implacable. The still moonlight is all round about; nothing whatsoever moves save that mad heaving mass, which rolls and struggles over and over, sometimes with stifled sounds, sometimes with none. The horse stops grazing, and stands and gazes at it from the top of the rock above the gunyah.

Suddenly the Black extricated himself; and no sooner was he extricated than away he bounded. By the side of their Ghibber Gunyah, the outlaws had made a few rude stepping-places up the rock. Thither he flies; the white man after him: as he reaches the top, his pursuer is close at his heels. The Black pauses, and catching hold by some strong roots about his mid-height, sinks a little and sets his foot on the white man's chest, and driving him off his foothold sends him slipping and reeling to the bottom. Not a word had they interchanged. Reuben's greeting was the crash of his piece against the Black's; and the Black's farewell was the clatter of his horse's heels over the stone-strewn hill.

Exasperated to the highest degree, Reuben returned to the scene of the struggle, and recovering his favourite piece, scaled the rock and proceeded to comprehend the lay of the country, previously to making his way back. The surface presented, he was aware, no serious impediments to a direct course, except the height of some of the ranges: and the full moon made the more immediate management of the feet almost as easy now as at noon.

Before he commenced his return, curiosity prompted him to walk round to the spot beneath which hung that mysterious victim. And now, looking down from close above the log that had outweighed the body, he could see clearly that the feet were much farther from the ground than the rope from either end of the log. That log must have been thrown from above—from the very spot on which he stood. As the thought struck him, he cast his eyes down towards his own feet. There, glittering in the moonlight, lay some small square object. He stooped and took it up: it was Beck's tin case. Why, it must have been he who had hurled over that heavy lump of timber, and have jerked his box from his pocket in the

effort. This explained all: the non-return of the renegade bushranger to Rachael—the loss of Beck's box—the removal of the gang—Beck's attitude, conscious-stricken, when he had descried him. With a fresh and more earnest feeling of the duty of exterminating such a gang, Reuben turned towards the Rocky Springs.

Night-travelling in an imperfectly known part is always difficult, even to the best bushmen: hence, it was not till considerably after sunrise that Reuben reached the Rocky Springs. Refreshment and sleep were now indispensable. But he felt that the price he was obliged to pay for them, in exhibiting the tokens of the ferocity of his contest with the Black, was almost too great. Still it was important, if Mr. Bracton had arrived, to see him; and he must now have a horse, and an efficient plan must be concerted for following up the outlaws till they were taken. Reuben would now rather have paid a corps of police himself for six months than permitted Beck to retain his triumphant position. But the worst of all, when he came to make his appearance at the cottage, was the distress of Katharine.

When Reuben rose in the afternoon, Mr. Bracton had arrived; and shortly afterwards home came young Tommy, with his steed something the better in plight for the lesson he had had about his hard riding down. He had news, moreover, to tell:—Mr. Hurley, on whom he had called coming up (his eye still upon a half-crown, and this time successfully), was intending to follow him the next day, and add his knowledge of the country, and of those likely to be colluding with the outlaws, to the efforts making already for their apprehension.

Reuben advised Mr. Bracton on no account to leave the cottage unprotected by the police for the present, but to be content with adding only a couple of troopers to the pursuing party. It was clear, both by the direction of the tracks from the station whence the horses were stolen, and by the reports that had reached the farm subsequently, that the gang were travelling in a direct line for Budawong Mountain; and how fit a place that was for their purposes, and therefore how likely to be their actual destination, Reuben knew well. He therefore proposed to follow them himself at once; and, taking Tommy with him, traverse the

mountain alone, whilst Tommy watched the horses down in the open ground. Mr. Bracton, Mr. Hurley, and a couple of troopers could then come on as soon as Mr. Hurley arrived, and camp where Tommy was stationed, till Reuben came out of the mountain. The necessary equipments collected, the arrangement was immediately carried out. Once more, with a bursting heart, Katharine flew to the secrecy of her chamber, and appeared that day no more.

The most marked features of this gloomy wilderness of woods, ravines, and crags, have already been indicated. The Australian and his companion had to camp for one night on their way thither; and the next afternoon, about two o'clock, they found themselves passing through a forest, covered with coarse, long grass beneath, and thick and lofty foliage over head. This spot is at the very base of the mountain, and partly hemmed in by spurs from it. Outside lay a wide and nearly level plain, which they had just traversed, affording good grass and water for the horses. At the edge of the forest, and within its shelter, Reuben directed his companion to camp, leaving the horses to feed out in the open ground. Mr.

Bracton, on his part, had directions which would conduct him to the spot.

Losing no time, the native took the fresh piece he had borrowed at Mr. Bracton's, and commenced his search. Timber has at various times been drawn out of these wild gullies, and his first scrutiny was directed to the various roads thus made into the mountain. But none of them yielded the faintest trace of recent disturbance : forsaken pits and ruined huts generally terminated them within a very short distance.

At length he met with a steep, dry creek or ravine, and there his eye immediately detected recent disturbance of the stones. Next the softer stones revealed the dint of horse-shoes ; and lastly, clinging to one of the shrubs, was a whip-lash, that had very recently been detached ; for its threads were still fine and distinct at the point, unclotted by rain or heavy dew. This track it became important to run down, for the sky was again becoming overcast, and it had already conducted up on to the top of a moderately high ridge, thickly covered with long grass. The track forward was plain enough at present ; but rains with wind on that elevated spot would soon cast the grass into its

natural position and efface it. Reuben hurried forward; but in these thick forests it soon becomes dark, and he had before long to check himself at the end of the grassy track: the course of the party, be they who they might, at this point entered a brush so thick that, with the little remaining light, it was impossible to discern their foot-marks farther. There was no danger of his failing to make his way back; for ten steps on either side off the line he had pursued from the head of the dry creek, would be on to a declivity so precipitous that he must immediately become aware of the deviation. He therefore sat down, rather to rest a while and smoke, than for any other purpose.

As he sat smoking, he could not but reflect on the chequered fortunes that were at that instant progressing with the various individuals more immediately within the circuit of his own observations: his poor, heart-broken Mary; Katharine no less dear, and for the hour even yet more agitated; Marianna, so long so unhappy, now on the point of obtaining an opportunity (one he had been earnestly imploring her not to throw away), of rectifying an exaggerated sentiment, and becom-

ing once more the happy and cherished friend of the object of her own first affection; Rachael, so beautiful and loving, and yet lone: on the other hand, Willoughby perhaps no more a member of the race of earth; Mr. Bracton, struggling; Martin Beck and his gang accumulating over themselves a weight of retributive influence, which within a few hours would probably crush them into irretrievable perdition. At that very instant there came a sound upon the breeze, so fitful and sharp, so like the mocking merriment of fiends, that it made him spring up on to his feet. It seemed like a scornful answer to his last thought. Again all was silent. But after a time there came occasionally, from the same quarter, sounds something like the lowing of distant cattle, and yet so unlike that he doubted if such they could be.

More and more intensely and anxiously, each time the sounds reached him, the Australian listened. He knew how singularly the configuration and other circumstances of the surface of the earth modify sounds, so that a sound familiar to the ear in a plain is often scarcely recognisable amongst broken forest-clad hills. He knew no sounds

whatever exactly like these that now reached him. Cattle would scarcely be where they came from : but bushrangers would. At his feet, but hidden in the darkness, for miles forward, lay gully and depth, and cold wet gulfs rifted into the earth, their intermediate ridges peering up between, all clad with such a tangled mesh of mighty trees, wreathed round by tough sinewy vines, that, as each old giant rotted at its root, the vines still held it in its place—the dead amidst the living. But he knew that through the very heart of that terrible wilderness the sea-coast aborigines had a track by which they visited the interior settlements. Might it not be a party of them, camped some two or three miles a head ? And now the darkness began to grow thick, and so rayless from above, that fire-light could plainly be distinguished at the very distance and quarter the sounds came from. More ; it was the light of brushwood of some size : a thin and exquisitely purple glow, such as would result from the heaping together of large junks of some species of brush-timber. Therefore it was not a blacks' fire, which is always made of small sticks. Again he listened ; and at length heard plainly, but faint beyond expression,

the *chop—chop—chop*—of an axe; the heavier tool of the white man. Though the profound silence preserved the sound thus far, it could be compared to nothing but *itself whispered*: it fell on the ear like the faint tap of the death-watch.

He now felt convinced that the shouts of merriment had come from the party at the fire; that they were white men; that they had reached it some time that day by the track he had run down thus far; and that they were horsemen. This was all sound induction: but to it nothing further could be added, at present; except that just such a party as he had found within, he had been pursuing from without. It only remained for him to make his way back to where he left young Tommy, and have some supper, and light the pipe, and roll himself in his 'possum cloak,—he could go to sleep without rocking.

The weather held up: no rain fell; but the night was gusty and wavering, and the wind sounded moaningly. To all of them, wheresoever they were, it seemed as if they were waiting, expectant of sorrowful tidings. To Mr. Hurley, as he lay at the inn of the settlement where he stopped that night, the short squalls, as they flew

ruffling past his window, seemed to presage some dash of unexpected calamity. To Marianna, as she lay still ruminating, they seemed to say, "Thoughtless! it will soon be otherwise with thee!" To Katharine it said, "Lady, know this:—love so pranked, so playful, is but a false guide that lures into a vale of tears." To Mary, as it bore up from the wide, wild sea, the boom of Barrenjueh, it uttered but one word—one syllable: it murmured again, and again, and again,—“Death! death! death!” Mr. Bracton and Mrs. Bracton too listened; and spoke of their sons that were either on or under the main: and, before he slept, Reuben Kable also listened: but he was out beneath the open sky, upon the cool, sweet earth, and ever and anon could see the bright and everlasting stars betwixt those rolling clouds, and hear sweet murmuring waterfalls amidst the wail of winds.

As soon as it was light enough to move about, Reuben, leaving his young scapegrace countryman (who, by-the-bye, was a very willing lad, and excellent company) to make up the fire and put down the quart-pots, walked out into the flat to make sure that the horses had not strayed; and

then, after breakfast, telling Tommy to stick to his post till Mr. Bracton's arrival, he took his gun and once more ran the dry creek up to the grassy ridge ; followed that out to his last night's station, and finally proceeded to trace the course of the party into the thick brush.

There was a good passage for a single horseman (but no more), partly natural, partly cleared by the few travellers whom the blacks had conducted that way to and from the coast. Thus the party having travelled in file the day before, and not spread, it was impossible to discover their number. For nearly three miles down, the path kept on ; up and along the sides of hills—everywhere amidst massive trees, and tangling vines canopied overhead, to the utter exclusion of the sunbeams : and, though it was now summer, dank and chilly as the grave. Here, a solitary pheasant, caught scratching up the herbless earth, flew terrified away ; there, a gaunt companionless bush-dog, hunting down a creek for crayfish, surlily snarled at being disturbed, or uttered his yet more dismal and prolonged howl : else, nothing moved ; nor was there any sound. The Australian kept on his way.

At length he drew near the bottom of a long fall, and began to see along the level at the foot. The brush terminated with the declivity; and then a large forest-flat expanded forwards and far off to the right; but at the left, from the precise point where he came down, was high broken ground, with a precipitous rocky face, running straight ahead from where he stood. A second glance shewed smoke, lying about in the motionless atmosphere of the hill-shielded concavity. A few more cautious steps, and by stooping he could see, at about half gunshot, a large tarpaulin arranged for a tent-hut. The fire was so low that only a faint mist of smoke could be discerned arising. The face of the hut was mainly towards him, and its back was against the enormous barrel of a prostrate gum—one at least five feet in diameter. Not a living thing seemed to be stirring. Shifting his position a little, he could see several saddles, and a number of small arms of various sorts, but chiefly muskets, roughly piled beneath the shelter of the tarpaulin; and upon the ground at the inner end the raised mass of the occupants sleeping, covered with their blankets. The whole of the

space between the range and the hut—indeed the whole of the little track of low, rich forest—was covered with a harvest of long, rank grass ; and, lastly, there were two dark objects beyond the fire, like square half-gallon bottles lying on their sides. It seemed certain that this was the party who had been carousing last night, and almost equally so that they were the bushrangers. All speculation, however, was shortly exchanged for certainty. Forth came Beck, and after putting the logs together, proceeded to dress himself. The white native could not but smile, as he observed the stiffness and evident discomfort of some of Beck's motions : it was evident that his own sensations ever since the struggle were fully rivalled by the Black's.

Beck did not see him ; he appeared to have been drinking, and looked and moved like one moody and downcast. After he had dressed, he stood for a few minutes with his hands behind him, and his back to the fire, alternately yawning and looking up amongst the tree heads, or turning and fixing his eyes intently on some fine gum-tree, whose barrel would once have been a prize to him. Finally, he went into the hut again, and

began rousing his mates. Reuben took the opportunity to hasten up the hill-side into the cover of the brush, and proceeded back to his camping-place.

It was nearly noon, but no one had arrived. Hour passed after hour:—still the same. At length he despatched young Tommy to endeavour to meet the expected reinforcement, and urge them forward. There were certain settlers in the line they would follow, with whom Mr. Bracton and Mr. Hurley were intimate, and at some of whose farms they were sure to call.

And now the questions presented themselves, what had the gang done with their horses?—How far off were they?—Could they be suddenly pounced on before they had time to get their horses and saddle? But nothing he had observed presented the means of solving the principal problem,—as to the probability of their being able to make good their escape. To and fro he walked, smoked, pondered, gathered wood, went to the horses, came back, walked to and fro, made a pot of tea, smoked again. “What, in the name of fortune, is keeping them? What a slow-going, crawling set these English are!” But then he

bethought himself that Katharine was now fairly his own. *She* was English. He must forget henceforth all these scoffing phrases he had got hold of on that subject. Still, this was not the main thing now : it did not bring him a bit nearer to Martin Beck and his gang. Well, *every* great and good thing must be struggled for ; and waited for, till the struggle was gone through.

The whole day passed, and they came not. That night he had to keep his watch alone. But next morning, about ten o'clock, as he stood at the edge of the little plain, he saw the large figure of Mr. Bracton emerge from the opposite bush, Mr. Hurley riding beside him, and two troopers behind them again.

Mr. Hurley had not arrived till a day after he had expected to reach the Rocky Springs ; but they had lost no time after he did arrive, riding on immediately he had taken some refreshment.

It now only remained to decide what method of attack was to be pursued. The Australian held it to be best to wait for the arrival of Tommy ; and, consigning to him the care of all the horses, proceed on foot, and make a sudden dash upon the party and fight it out hand to

hand. Mr. Bracton thought the same. Mr. Hurley considered that by so doing there was every chance given to the outlaws to escape, and that riding into them before they could get time to mount, was the only course that could be depended on for preventing their escape ; or, at all events, the escape of some of them. The troopers maintained the same. As they had been so long under Mr. Hurley's orders, and Mr. Hurley stood more in the position of habitual command towards them than the Australian and Mr. Bracton, the two latter had to give way. Reuben, however, adhered to his own preference for his own part, and hiding his and Tommy's saddles, &c. in a scrub, went with them on foot.

It was one of those mornings when, after a brilliant sunrise, the heavens grew cloudy and the air chill and damp. And now the "mistiful Budthawong" was making good its title to the name. Not only was all wet, desolate, and dark in its mighty glens, and along its bleak wood-clad ridges, but one of those dense and magnificent deluges of mist already described was rolling over it, till the topmost heights them-

selves were enswathed; and traversing its surface was like walking about in the clouds. But the native's way once trodden could not be mistaken, and he led his companions fairly to the foot of the long fall of brush,—the brink of the forest where he had seen the camp of the outlaws.

It was impossible now to discern the tent from the foot of the hills: the fog was so dense that not above half the distance could be penetrated by the eye. But after they had listened a little while, the party could hear the rattle of the tin pots, and occasionally the sound of a voice: the bushrangers seemed to be at dinner. The sounds impressed them all with a distinct idea of the exact direction the hut lay in. They therefore prepared to make a headlong dash. Mr. Bracton had pistols only; Mr. Hurley, pistols and a rifle; Reuben, a double-barrelled fowlingpiece; and the police, carbines, pistols, and their cutlasses.

“*Now,*” said Mr. Hurley, just loud enough to be heard by his own party, but not by the bushrangers: and off went the whole line abreast, Reuben at the extreme left, on foot; all the rest on horseback. Suddenly, at about half-way across the flat, Reuben saw that he was running

full upon a deep creek bank, hidden from his former notice by the coarse, high grass; and, at the same instant, all the horses either stopped short or were forcibly reined back on to their haunches by their riders. There was a sudden confusion in the bushrangers' camp, and then the voice of Beck heard calling, cheerily, "Don't be afraid of 'em! Don't be afraid of 'em! The horses can't get across the creek." And almost before that was said, the report of a heavy piece was heard from the gang—probably, by the sound, a musket—shattering Mr. Hurley's right arm between the elbow and shoulder. The soldiers instantly fired together. Not an object could be seen to aim at; but it was evident one of the shots had taken effect upon the clustered gang; for there was a loud talking amongst them, mingled every now and then with the deep, sad moaning of a man in great agony. Then could be heard Beck's voice again—"Carry him behind the tree: you're hurting him, Rooney: lift him gently." The soldiers had loaded again, and, whilst Reuben and Mr. Bracton were helping Mr. Hurley (who was bleeding profusely) off his horse, *bang, bang*, went the two carbines a

second time. The bushrangers answered only by a general laugh ; for, whilst they were carrying their wounded comrade off at one side of the hut, the soldiers had fired at the other.

Leaving Mr. Hurley with Mr. Bracton, the Australian advanced to the edge of the creek, to look for a crossing-place. The bushrangers were now firing again : but it was quite a matter of indifference where any of the attacking party stood, or whither they went, for there was not the slightest possibility of the bushrangers descrying them through the fog. The soldiers, however, in the cool sagacity of military instinct, kept now and then changing their positions ; whilst their antagonists after once they began again, continued firing from the same spot. Reuben found the creek banks, on both sides, the mere, bare, upright faces of a fissure in the mother rock, and its superincumbent stratum. Following the water down to the right, he, however, observed that where the forest-ground terminated, the horse tracks again became visible. There was no probability, or indeed, apparently, possibility, of the outlaws assuming the offensive ; unless they knew of some crossing-place higher up

which appeared unlikely, as the horse-tracks were downwards. He, therefore, hurried on to try if he could find a practicable crossing-place. Both parties still kept rattling away. His own party, however, he knew must still have the long odds in the contest with them; for they kept moving at every discharge, whilst the bush-rangers did not; and, from their tact in loading, they were firing full twice to the outlaws once. His search produced no result, after being carried out for a full half-mile; till he began to feel in danger of being thought unnecessarily absent.

The creek, some length further down, seemed even to make a sweep right back, almost as if it protected them in rear as well as in front. As he hastened back, he could hear the desperadoes mingling cheers, and shouting wild gibes with their shots. As he came up, and began to gather his thoughts for some final mode of action, he heard their last salute. It was from Beck: "There; soldiers! my chaps are going to knock-off for a smoke: you'd better have one yourselves. Don't try to sneak us, though. I'm on sentry, and the pieces are all ready."

And with this, as if in a sort of wantonness, he slammed off both his own barrels in the same instant ; and both the shots went mingling in one hum (it seemed within six inches) past his countryman's face. The answer was just what might be expected—the instantaneous double report of Reuben's piece levelled in the same line back again. But nothing followed, except a fresh laugh.

Mr. Hurley, meantime, exhibited the most startling symptoms—rapid hemorrhage, and faintness so fast increasing, that his self-possession seemed every now and then on the point of giving way. With Reuben's assistance holding his arm, Mr. Bracton, however, now succeeded in binding a pledget of rag sufficiently firm down to check almost entirely the bleeding. It was clearly now a duty to get Mr. Hurley out of the brush, and to a place where he could be attended to. One of the soldier's horses was badly wounded in the flank : so badly that it was impossible to get him up the hill. They, therefore, were about to take upon themselves the office of carrying their former commander up the ranges, whilst Reuben and Mr. Bracton managed the horses, when Mr. Hurley seemed to wish for water. Again Reuben

tried the creek, this time up the flow of the water. About a hundred yards up, he found a spot where men might climb both down the near bank and up the opposite; though not horses. After drinking, Mr. Hurley expressed a conviction that he would shortly be able to sit his horse; and Reuben, as the firing still paused, went once more to examine the crossing-place he had found; the corporal with him. They crossed, and stole to the edge of the bluff, but there again were checked: there seemed no way of descent. But as the bushrangers still continued inactive, they traversed the edge for some distance. By-and-bye their advance was checked by just such another creek, or else the same returned back. As they stopped and looked about them, there came the sounds of a mounted party riding hurriedly some distance off amidst the dense mist on the opposite bank; and at length they thought they heard the sound of the voice of Beck. Further attention made the surmise certainty.

It was now evident the gang had once more had fortune on their side. No more shots were fired by them: nor any returned, when several

were directed against their tent. Borrowing Mr. Hurley's horse, Reuben hastily ran the creek round, to satisfy himself what exactly their position had been. He found that, just as it had appeared to him, it at length swept right back : the backward channel in some places not a hundred yards from the forward, and so on, along at the very back of their encampment ; where there was a good crossing-place on to another track of forest. They had, therefore, merely ceased firing, under pretence of having a smoke, to get time to collect their horses and escape. That they had ridden away, there was no room to doubt. There were the tracks of all the horses' and the men's feet where they had saddled, on the side furthest from their hut, or that round which he had ridden ; together with an old handkerchief saturated with blood : and then forward through the forest their horses' hoof-marks in a body departing.

Passing over the easy crossing-place, he found himself under the bluffs he had traversed above with the corporal. Thus the creek hemmed in a very long narrow point of forest ; everywhere but at the end, where it was equally inaccessible from the barrier of rock. It appeared to be a point

of land formed on a long tongue of rock, that had settled into the soft ground between the two lines of the creek. Advancing toward the hut, he found it forsaken. There were no indications of more than one of the outlaws having been wounded: blood on one spot before, and on one behind the tree. And now, on examining the great old tree barrel against which they had reared their tent, the secret of their impunity became revealed. A powder-horn and several lots of ball and slugs were lying at the back of the tree, whilst the front was torn in a score of places by the balls of the soldiers. So that they had stood, loaded, and fired from behind the tree in perfect security, after once their position was taken up: whilst they had, at the same time, so chosen the position of their camp as to have the only crossing-place by which they could be reached, nearest to themselves and the most concealed from those who might attack them.

The steady fortitude of Mr. Hurley's character at length enabled him to muster resolution sufficient to carry him through the task of riding back into the open ground. Here the fresher atmosphere and some slight refreshment still further

re-invigorated him ; and, by sending forward to an adjacent settler's, an easier conveyance than his horse was procured. A few miles further, and a gentleman of the medical profession, himself a settler, resided : here, his arm received the necessary surgical treatment ; and from thence to the Rocky Springs—whither Mr. Bracton insisted upon his proceeding whenever he moved at all, and whither, therefore, Mr. Hurley felt quite competent to proceed at once—every accommodation was easily secured.

Tommy had come up before the return of the party out of the mountain ; and at his countryman's request, and on promise of a handsome reward, he undertook the task of following the outlaws at a distance, and ascertaining their line of route, and, if possible, their intentions. Having laid Reuben under contribution for all the tobacco he had about him, the young black fellow pursued his quick and stealthy way into the mountain, whilst the white men made their homeward journey.

To Reuben, as the speediest horsemen, fell the task of hastening on, to break to the family at the cottage the tidings of what had occurred :

a step fully necessary, considering the possibility that an exaggerated account might be conveyed to them by travellers, or the soldiers, before Mr. Hurley's arrival.

And now it was all in vain for Marianna to attempt to conceal how much she had all along loved Mr. Hurley. When the tidings were told, though carefully told, first there was a show of the unflinching firmness of her father; then came strange varyings of the countenance, and at last, a choking flood of tears.

“Oh!” said Reuben, “you have quite spoilt it now. Hurley would give five hundred pounds to see this! but as he can't see it, he shall hear of it to the slightest particular. Now you had much better make a virtue of necessity, and tell him yourself. Will you?”

But it was useless to attempt to extract an answer. Marianna scarcely comprehended what she was asked. She only knew that Mr. Hurley was badly wounded; that he had always been faithful to her and just to others, and loving, and long-suffering, and forgiving, when she was only capricious and harsh.

Nor by the time of his arrival—her thoughts

now willing to be arranged aright—had she failed to reflect that he yet remained unthanked, unpaid by her for a momentous service. It was his anxiety to do justice—his anxiety to protect the interests of her family, that had led him to visit the Welshman at the gang; to come back and have a conference with Mr. Moses; to dash off from that very conference at the head of the police, on hearing of the attack of the blacks; and thus bring to bear on her parent's and cousin's and her own rescue the double energies of Reuben and himself. All this she had forgotten before. Reuben was the ostensible agent; but Mr. Hurley she now saw was the true mover of the agency. Had he been other than he was, Reuben would have found them all too late. She felt, with deep compunction, that she of all persons in the world ought not to depreciate Mr. Hurley's rigorous and unbending resolves to be in all things a just man. That law of his character which she had so bitterly antagonized had been the minister of protracted existence to hers. She had been persecuting the spirit that had preserved her life.

And when Mr. Hurley arrived, everything that

a generous and impassioned heart could do to atone for its error, Marianna did. No unworthy hesitation, no stinted amend could be charged against her: nothing that could benefit him was too trivial for her to think of—too troublesome for her to perform. *Of course*, he hardly remembered that anything had befallen him. Not so, Marianna: she could not forget it.

“You shall go after no more bushrangers, Mr. Hurley. If your office necessarily involves it, you must give the office up. I’d sooner be your hutkeeper, whilst you shepherded your own sheep, than know you were going into such a danger as this again.”

“So that you would still like to have your own way—*sometimes*.”

“No: I’ll never insist, rashly, again.”

“Say—in the very point you have just declared your will upon. Wasn’t there a *must* in it?—I thought I heard one. If I should happen to demur, and still insist on earning my living in the manner I think best, wouldn’t you try and get your way?”

“Ay, perhaps on such a point as that.”

“Even though it should go near to sepa-

rate us again. Do you hear that, Mrs. Bracton?——”

“Oh! pray, pray don't. I never will do anything so unkind again: believe me.”

Thus passed by several days, and then came the shrewd young aborigine with his tidings.

“Well, Tommy?”

“Well, Reuben?”

“Any news?”

“Yes: me murry hungry. I been go a good way. I find Beck camped close up Curroc-billy that first night, and stop there all next day. I watch him. Old Morgan think he keeps a good look out; but it no use: I always see bush-ranger, but never bushranger see me.”

“Well; but which way are they gone?”

“D—n it! A'n't I telling you now. You're too much in a hurry. Beck stop in ranges close up Curroc-billy, because Warraghi can't travel. Warraghi shot, you know. They can hardly make him come on out of Budthawong. So that die and bury him in a little sandy creek. After they go away, I been go and see his grave: not very deep: native dog pull him out di-recaly.”

“Come, come, Tommy, now cut the yarn as short as you can.”

“Well, I do. You shouldn’t speak like that, Reuben. I go on then till next night, and then ’nother night; and then that camp close up grog-shop, and Morgan Brown go in out of bush and buy some grog, and that corrobbera a good deal; and I hear Beck tell the rest they shall go down along-a Brisbane Water, where I come to you that time when young lady sit down in parlour along-a you, and they all say *yes*,—same as Englishman always say. That going to take away your boat I believe—I think—and go to ’nother country.”

At this termination of the tale, Katharine, who was leaning on Reuben’s arm, turned and looked at him: already his face had taken the hue of death.

“Oh! Katharine,” he said, scarcely articulating his words, “give the black boy what I promised him—I forgot what it was; he’ll tell you. They’re three good days ahead of me, go which way I will.”

Reuben was thinking of Mary, not of the boat.

“I shall never catch them this time till it’s too late. I might have thought of this if I hadn’t——”

He was about to say, “thought too much of my own selfish gratification ;” but he silenced the thought, lest it should obliquely wound the too sensitive spirit which had committed itself to his care. Within a quarter of an hour he had bidden her adieu.

CHAPTER XII.

Positions of all.—Mary's Dreams.—Homeward bound.—
“Jolly Will Howard.”—The Black and his White Pursuer.—The Bush afire.—Mary and Margaret.—The old Nurse stricken.—Tony's Warning.—The Black's Plans.—The Robber's Fate.—Willoughby's Return.—Conclusion.

THE main actors in the fierce drama, as well as those to whose lot fell the meeker but more painful task of contemplation and endurance, were now all holding in their breath: these to obtain power to bear; those, power to do.

The plan of the gang was settled. It was a last effort; and men in mid-life know well that when a great thing has to be done, and can be but once done, it ought to be done thoroughly. It was impossible for the Black, with any chance of safety, to travel with his comrades by day along the high roads; yet the high roads were the only course by which they could hope to keep time by the forelock in their undertaking.

They therefore separated from him, and travelled as single stockmen by day ; and he, resting and hiding in the bush by day, rode ahead the same stages by night ; the top of Brisbane Water being appointed as their final rendezvous. Reuben Kable, sensible of the utter inadequacy of his means to his end, had no alternatives but to either quail and give way and sink at the very moment when the destinies of all he admired and loved hung on his sole strength ; or mould his plan as perfectly as he could, and then give himself into it as so much molten iron. Nor was he deficient of sagacity for the one, or of decision for the other. Deliberation yielded but a single counsel : a long day, and *speed*,—a short night, and *sleep*. Henceforth it was so. And there was need. Beck had menaced hitherto : now he neither told his comrades, nor comprehended himself what he meant to do : his wrath refused to be limited to a form,—his only feeling was a maddening desire to reach the field for letting it loose.

Mary's first feeling, when her brother so abruptly left her, was astonishment at the sudden change that had taken place in things ; then,

naturally hopeful, and especially so in everything she saw Reuben putting his hand to, she gave way to uncontrolled delight, and flew to Margaret to tell her who would be Reuben's wife: and then (ere very long, alas!) she bethought her who and what *she was herself*. And by morning, again, even Reuben and Katharine had become only secondary images in her mind. Then she even forgot how day was passing after day without bringing her any tidings about them. All day long the dismal, weary, surging sound of the engulfing sea kept roaring in her ears, till she scarce took notice of what was passing before her eyes: and when she slept (if such a condition can be called sleep) the visual organism avenged itself, and saw the pageantries of an eternal sorrow rolling past for evermore. Sometimes she thought she was wandering in a cold
ace, where a pall-covered coffin lay upon an earthen floor, and that she wanted to raise the pall and lift the lid and creep in beside the dead, but some one from behind her held her hand, and she could not: she struggled,—and in the agony of her heart she fought to have her will,—and still could not. Then she thought she was

going about on a rainy morning, miserably clad, through the wet, pitiless bush, till she came to a little hut, where there was smoke and a fire; and when she had begged and prayed a long while she heard one coming to the door to let her in. It was Willoughby. He was smiling as usual. But directly he saw who it was he shut the door in her face; and though she knocked and knocked, he would not come to her again; and after a long, long broken-hearted importunity, till she was quite ashamed, she sank down at the door-side: by-and-bye Reuben came up, with a number of the men, looking for her, and took her up in his arms and carried her home, and she knew she was in her own room again; and opened her eyes, and saw it was so. So it went on, day by day and night by night,—dreams mingling with realities, and the mind gliding to and fro, between imagination and perception, till she was becoming altogether so different from herself—so strange—that even the feeble eyes of Margaret saw it, and could see it so constantly and clearly that wonder began to be lost in fear.

And yet in that dark hour (strange fortunes of

men!) there was plunging onwards heavily, from the cold South Seas toward sunnier regions of the earth, that well-navigated bark she had longed through many a dreary day and night to hail, and once more set her foot on in the still waters of Sydney cove: the skipper much as usual, only a little lighter in person, and much heavier in purse. Oh, that Mary could have heard (unpolished though they were) the anticipations, and the jokes, and the prophecies of the crew! and boy Jack's response to the mate's "Come, cheerly boys, cheerly boys," as they roused taut the backstays, and got all ready for going into port:—

"The Skipper's sixpen'orth is waiting at home;
Cheerly boys! cheerly boys! pull'ee, hoyhoy!
She lists to the wind, and she watches the foam:
Cheerly boys! cheerly boys! pull'ee, hoyhoy!
And she's trim as a midsummer 'DAISY' in bloom:
Cheerly boys! cheerly boys! pull'ee, hoyhoy!
'*It's long my lad, long my lad, long till you come.*'
Cheerly boys! cheerly boys! rous'ee, hoyhoy!
'*Stick close to your binnacle; jam the blocks home;
For it's long my lad, long my lad, long till you come.*'"

But time and space have laws; and they are

not the laws of breaking hearts. On the other hand, those who knew the landward side of the case had least hope of it. Mr. Hurley was wearing out day and night in a fever of apprehension; unwilling to speak his thoughts, unable to conceal them; unable to mingle in the struggle; unable to restrain his mind from holding it in perpetual presence; administering hope to Katharine, exhibiting all his fears to Marianna and Rachael, and Mr. and Mrs Bracton. Katharine herself could not be said to either think or feel. Her sensations were like those of one who is buried in a trance, and must bear but cannot tell the agony: it was the swoon of the volition beneath the overstress of the forces that should call volition into activity—the benumbedness of every faculty save a dreadful consciousness. Her waking was a stupor; her sleep became an atrocious vision. They spoke to her; and minutes afterwards she heard them. They were silent; and suddenly she made answer to something that had never been said.

And as the matter became more widely talked of, and still more composed and uninterested minds canvassed its probabilities, more and more

unfavourable became the verdict upon the probability of Reuben Kable overtaking the outlaw. The troopers at the township simply and at once pronounced it a lost case. "The young man," they said, "might kill half a dozen horses and himself to boot, but he'd never overtake Beck, with the advantage of such a start."

So, too, said the hands on the farm, ever interested in such matters. A struggle in any form betwixt the free and bond is always a subject that arouses attention, and usually partisanship, in the huts. In this case, however, there was very little of the latter: Beck was so unequivocally wrong, and his menace against the females so revolting to manly spirit, that no one thought of vindicating him. And whilst Katharine's graceful and retiring character had gradually drawn upon her a universal, though equally unconscious, gaze of admiration and reverence, Reuben's, as full of directness, valour, and strength, had operated as forcibly in his favour. But day came and day went, without tidings. Long and varied were the speculations; and only one thing seemed certain to all,—that whenever the two men met next, it would be

like the crash of two gigantic ships encountering in full career at sea, amidst the uncontrollable forces of a hurricane. Likewise it was felt to be to a certain extent their own business;—Miss Katharine belonged to *them*; and where was there another like her? And was not the Australian her protector?—possibly not an idea consonant to refined etiquette: but it was their idea, and a fact, which is everything. Every evening there was a gathering after supper to canvass the affair over and over again. Still the conclusion recurred,—“We must wait: we shall hear by-and-bye.” For the first time since his installation, the Welshman lost sight of his office in the urgings of his individuality.

“I give half a gallon of rum to-morrow night to drink Mr. Reuben’s health. Who go to the township for it, after we knock off work?” said he.

“I,” said Turpin; “only I must have the loan of that there horse of your’n.”

“Done!” And next evening, about the same hour, their usual escape-valve for over-excited feeling was in full play. But it sufficed not: the yarn went on, and the grog went round;

but three-fourths of the men were standing instead of sitting as usual.

“Come, Turpin, you is always sing very well,” said the Cambrian; “give us one stave, if you like. It is no use, lads, to drop down. I know the best man sure to have the best luck in the end.”

Turpin’s busy but feeble mind refused its task. He could think of nothing fit for the hour. He could not forget the parlour at Brisbane Water, and Mary; it agitated even him to think of that sylph-like girl in the hands of the desperate and malevolent Black; and the more he thought, the more he bewildered himself.

“Come,” said the Welshman. “I think she is go to sleep, lads,” he added, after waiting some time; “you see her? She is not sing to-night! but she will always sing before; too much, sometimes.”

“The chap isn’t in such luck as you are,” put in one of the hands. “*He* isn’t going to be married before the month’s out.”

“Well,” said the overseer, “I suppose the ’oman was make for the man, and she is make for the ’oman. You cannot get a wife, my man, or you ’ood ne’er grumble at another to get one.”

“No offence meant, Mr. Thomas,” interposed

another ; “ and none should be taken. Attention! Silence for Turpin ! ”

But the Considerate Man was still for once baffled. The half-delirious regions of his indefinite morality yielded nothing heroic ; but he got as near to the legitimate as the least spurious could be, and sang a sort of bacchanalian dirge for—

JOLLY WILL HOWARD.

JOLLY Will Howard

To his grave's gone ;
May the earth rest lightly
His body on.

Never better man
Served the “Dials” yet,
Than honest Will Howard,
At the “Duke of Somerset.”

None beat his liquors,—
None ever drewed such beer ;
To Epsom, Ascot, and Goodwood,
He went every year.

With short, broad apron,
White, on his belly round,—
King of all the L. V.s,
Will was long ago crowned.

We done it in the bar
One races' night,
After "the Duchess" had cut;
Will showing fight.

One bumper more
To jolly, jolly Will,
Where he lies on his broad back,
Come, brothers, fill!

"And that there same thing is what *I suspect* we'll have to do for the Cornstalk," he added, as he finished.

"What!" exclaimed the Welshman, "she double her up head to heels, like a fish that is too long to go in a barrel. I am sure of it. I can do it myself. If I was there now, lads, I'ood leave the Black alone, and see what Mr. Reuben can do to her."

"Ay, lads," said Turpin, "this is about the time they'll be settling it."

And they knew so at the cottage, as well as at the huts. Mrs. Bracton made the tea; the form began; some drank more, some less, as they could;—all save Katharine. After a vain struggle to make no inroad on custom and decorum, and nearly choking herself, she put down her cup, looked for an instant at her uncle, beside whom

on the sofa she was sitting, and then fell into his arms, and sobbed and wept past all comforting.

It was the height of summer ; a regular westerly gale was on, and had been for some days, blowing from the arid wastes of the interior, parching vegetation, fevering and exciting animal life. Though the sun was nigh upon going down, the evening seemed as sultry as the noon had been. The Black stood with his jacket and waistcoat off, and his shirt turned back, laving his face and arms and breast in the cool water at the head of the lake-like bay, the sloop at anchor about four miles below, and its owners' home on the bank-side. "Four hours more!" he said. "Those fellows, surely, will not be long."

It was the silence of the battle-eve:—around him grew, above him rose the hundred thousand mighty gums, through which aforetime he had strolled, axe in hand, with nothing on his mind but the simple care of selecting a tree. Now? Why that past was like an infant's dream! He turned from the water, and looked back through the forest. There, within little more than a gunshot, lay one whom he remembered a magnate in the land, proudly sleeping in his own mausoleum.

Who had destined him to any meaner grave? Was he not a man? Who could prove that white in colour was greater than black in colour? Then, as he turned with folded arms and eyed the sloop and the farm, the true stress of the case recurred, and true African hate: and clapping his hands, he sprang, and hardened his muscles, and examined them; and seized his garments, and slunk back again into the cluster of bushes where he had lain all day.

The white native looked mournfully at the setting sun; but rode on. He had braced every nerve, and toned it into unison, and that was the forlorn hope of his soul; so he sat his horse as it tore on up rocky pathway, and plunged as furiously down again, or swept monotonously clattering along the roads cut through the mighty forest solitudes—he sat it still and imperturbable as a statue; meaning so to sit till he threw himself off it on to the scene of conflict.

The bush-fire was almost all over the country. Everywhere there was either the roaring of the flames, or the blackened skeletons of the trees which the fire had already scathed, or vast solitary tracts awaiting (as it seemed to the imagi-

nation, in breathless suspense) the rush of the fiery deluge. Over-head, along the tree-tops, the heavy westerly gale kept up one long unbroken roar; the smoke pervaded and overhung everything; and the feeble sunlight that struggled through it was only a gloomy purple glare, dazzling like light, and confusing like darkness. Even the wild and venomous things gendered and bred in dark and hidden places, rushed out, scared by the urgent warnings of their instinct, and crossed the path, and dared the enmity of man, rather than abide the search of the coming whirlwind of fire.

“It’s coming down headlong from the mountains,” said Beck, as he once more ventured from his hiding-place to the water’s edge; “nothing could chance better. It’ll be among the fences at the back of the farm in a couple of hours time: and then all the hands aboard the sloop, except a single man or so, will hasten ashore to help them on the farm to save the fences. There’ll be their dingy at the wharf for us to go aboard with, and the sloop as good as empty. She lies too far out for them aboard to hail the shore and give the alarm.”

Beck had made the voyage to and fro between Sydney and the various other harbours on the coast scores of times; and had been used to the navigation of the wide inlets of the part from his childhood, and was nearly as much at home on one of these little crafts as his countryman; so that he felt no doubt of working the *Mary Kable*, with the assistance of the single man that would be left aboard, and his own comrades. Whilst there was all night to get the few miles out to sea, and a first-rate wind, both for running down the bay, and then standing off shore. There was no doubt that, the craft once in their hands, they could be clean out of sight of land before daylight next morning. Impatient as he was, he knew he might fairly expect another hour to elapse before his comrades joined him. And, cheered with so much of promise, he certainly ought to take that patiently. Once more he shrouded himself in the bit of brush, and lay listening for the usual stifled *koo-eh*.

Mary and Margaret sat in the front verandah, at their work. They knew that the bush was on fire in the mountains, and that the wind was blowing it towards the farm; but they knew the

course that was always taken to stay its advances, when it was perceived to be really coming. So that the circumstance caused them no uneasiness; scarcely, indeed, elicited a remark. But at length Margaret said, as she looked down the ground,—

“The smoke comes thicker, bairn, than it did in the afternoon.”

“I told them,” answered her companion, arousing, after the lapse of some moments, from her abstraction, “to be sure and go and burn the grass round Willoughby’s fences and ours, if they saw it coming. I dare say that’s the smoke that you see now. They know what to do;”* and again she relapsed into the region of her own sad thoughts.

The sun sank lower—sank to the very edge of the sky; began to merge its disc behind the

* By burning the grass around the fences, &c., previously to the arrival of the bush-fire, it is left without material to feed upon; and then, unless there is also forest up to the very spot, it must stop. Settlers who are hemmed in by dense forest, generally take the precaution of clearing that for some space all round. If they do not, they are soon taught. When the grass is artificially fired, the parties doing it only allow small portions to be afire¹ at a time; watching its advance and smothering and beating it out with large boughs when it has done just enough.

mountain ridge ; yet, tenderly as that young woman and her aged mistress loved one another, they still sat in silence. Margaret had long given up as vain the endeavour to draw Mary into conversation ; and Mary's heart was too busy with its sad office within to attend to any save the most urgent ones without. The first love of womanhood is always replete with veneration ; and veneration is at once the most strenuous of the faculties in itself, and the least liable to the control of the others.

Still lower sank the sun ; glittered—a mere short line of splendour ; twinkled—a single spark ; and was gone. A few minutes afterwards the old woman began to move uneasily, and like one who is astonished ; but Mary saw it not : her eyes were fixed upon her work, her thoughts were far away ; and the deep sigh itself that bespoke their occupation only made its way forth after a struggle, with short, convulsive heavings of the bosom.

“ Bairn ! ” exclaimed the old woman, seriously, “ my sight is gone ! ”

“ What did you say, Margaret ? ” responded Mary, after a few moments, but without looking

up, and speaking in the tone of those who try to bear patiently the annoyance of some useless trespass on their attention from one they love.

“I cannot see, my bairn. It is all dark,” answered the nurse, after also herself pausing for a little while.

“Oh, Margaret!” exclaimed Mary, “how can you talk so? I know how you love me, and that you would do anything to divert my thoughts; but ——”

“Nay, bairn: when did I ever jest about the mighty power of God!”

“Margaret, what do you mean?” and, startled by the tone in which the old woman uttered her appeal, Mary sprang up, and laying her hand on her shoulder, bent and looked into her eyes. “Why, your eyes are as bright as mine; brighter than mine will be a twelvemonth hence. Dear Margaret, how you terrified me: and your face too! you look as if you really meant it.”

“My bairn,” repeated the old woman, “I tell you I can see no more than if my eyes were already buried in the grave. I hear whereabouts your face is as you speak, but I cannot see you—can-

not see the bush, or the water: even the light itself I cannot see. Oh, me ——”

“Margaret! Margaret! what is the matter?—why do you weep? What shall I do?”

“My bairn, my dear kind bairn, I am not far from home. Oh, that Reuben were here! I wish I could see him once more. Let one of the men fetch him.”

The last sentence was uttered with such incoherent expression in gesture and voice, that Mary at once reached the comprehension of the truth; but on trying to get the old woman to go in-doors, she discovered that she was unable to rise from her chair: the lower extremities were powerless.

Mary ran into the kitchen for old Jemmy: he was not to be seen anywhere about:—to the huts; the men were all gone. She bethought herself of the sailors, and ran down to the wharf to try if she could secure the observation of any of them by a signal; but there lay the dingy at the wharf: and then she recollected that in all probability they were all off into the bush to look after the fire. After a great struggle, by her utmost strength she succeeded in getting her helpless burden into her own room; it was that

immediately at the back of the little breakfast parlour, and entered by a door through the further wall of that room.

By this time, the short twilight of the country was almost at an end : a thick shadow was spreading itself over everything, and as Mary stood out a little way from the back verandah, and listened for some shout to indicate whereabouts the men were, not a sound could be heard save the mingled roar of the coming fire and the wind : nothing moved but the agitated tree-tops : even the dogs were gone off into the bush. A single cow stood, disturbed and melancholy, outside the stockyard, waiting to be admitted to her calf. Mary knew now that she could do nothing but wait patiently beside Margaret, till the return of some of the men from the bush.

She found Margaret, on going in, just as she left her, as to position, but breathing at times very heavily, and then again with more freeness ; at times, also, there was a little gurgling in her throat. On lighting a candle, her face exhibited nothing alarming—but beamed with a bright and rapt tranquillity, without a single trace of pain.

On speaking to her, Mary found she was once more perfectly sensible. After a few sentences, the old woman said:—

“Light a candle, honie, and sit down beside me.”

Mary sighed as she sat down, observing,—
“The candle is a-light, Margaret.”

“Nay, honie ——”

“Yes, Margaret, indeed: recollect your sight is gone.”

The old woman seemed to recollect that it was so; but she expressed the recollection no further than by a slight sigh. Mary knelt down at the bedside and grasped her hand.

“Honie,” said the nurse, “I want to see Reuben. Where is he? Why does he not come? Why do you sob so? My sweet bairn, kiss me. Why do you sob so? Ah, me! I cannot understand what I am talking about. It seems as if I was here, and yet not here.”

After pausing a little while, she proceeded:—

“I hope the fire won’t get to the stacks. When Reuben comes in, tell him—ah! me, I’m lost again—oh!—tell him conscience is the ear of the mind; and whenever we listen with it we may hear the voice of God: *that* ever rolls across

the universe announcing HIS whereabouts : if we follow the sound we shall surely reach the realms at length where HE himself is. Only he must mind not to mistake the clamour of his own heart for the Voice. *Be sure to tell him that.* But he'll be coming now : go out, bairn, and see if you can see him. I hope the fire won't get to the stacks. I know something is going to happen."

Mary, now thoroughly aroused by the solemn transaction that was so unexpectedly progressing before her, and thinking some of the people might be by this time returned, went out once more. All was now perfectly dark out of doors, save for the lurid, red, hazy gleam that was reflected round through the atmosphere on to the open ground and its buildings. As she stood, there seemed to come voices in dispute from the other side of the creek, from towards the haunted house : one in particular there seemed, speaking clear stern tones of command. Then, though she listened attentively, all remained silent. But when her attention had again wandered to the fire, she thought she heard another snatch of the very same sounds. But no ; the longer she listened the more silent everything in that direction

seemed to become ; save that her excited ear began to distinguish every change in the splash of the running stream.

She turned to go in ; at the instant she did so, Tony came bounding, in spite of his age and helplessness, with all the freakish gambols of a puppy towards her, from downwards of the bay, as if he had come from or through Willoughby's farm. He pretended to bite her hand ; and then laid down his head and rubbed it against her ankles, and lifted it and stood for an instant and looked her in the face with a strange *wow, wow, wow* that was like laughter, and tossed himself up and pawed with his forelegs in the air, and gave another yelp that seemed a cheer, or madness. " Oh, Tony, Tony !" cried Mary, " foolish, wicked dog ! playing, and the dear old hand that gave you milk when your mother died and you couldn't see, now dying within. Go away, sir. No ! here, come in and see her."

The old dog assumed a humble attitude, and, without a single look toward the fire, whither the other dogs were gone, began to follow his mistress in. But when he was half inside the doorway, he suddenly threw himself round and ran out

and stood under the verandah, and burst out into one of his wild volleys of wrath, till the very air itself vibrated, as under the roar of a lion. He walked to and fro, as if he could not make out which way the offending object lay :—now turning down the bay, now looking toward the fire, now examining the bush towards the haunted house. But when Mary gave up listening and looking with him, he, too, gave up his watch, and following close at her heels, went in with her.

“That fellow ’ll give you a job,” said Morgan to Beck, who, with the rest of the gang, was now on the side of the creek next to the haunted house. “You ’d better look that the priming hasn’t shook out of the pans of your pistols.”

“Oh, I’ve done all that already, as I lay waiting for you. I should think I’ve had time enough,” said the Black.

“Well, now you all mind what I say,” he continued, after a pause of thought. “A clear thing can be but a clear thing, and here it is before our faces. All the powers of man couldn’t make it plainer nor better. You do your parts as I tell you, and trust to my doing mine. I’ve got the dangerous part of the thing : yours is only a bit

of holiday pastime—rowing a boat from the bank to a vessel. I saw three hands row ashore, and I know such a craft in this trade never carries above four. You see I'm right, too, about all hands being off to look after the fences: you see, all the time Kable's sister stood out under the verandah, nobody came out of the huts; nor did she go to them to ask anything. And all the dogs, too, are gone with the men, or else, when that old dog yelped out as he did, the whole pack would have been at it. So just make sure of the sloop first (the dingy won't carry us all, and it's got so late, there'll be no time to spare); and then—you, Rooney, can pull a boat well, you say—bring the dingy back for ——”

The Black paused, as if he had come unintentionally on a point that still puzzled him.

“For you!” said Rooney. “Well?”

“Ay, well: then don't mind my pistol shot. That'll be for the dog. But if you hear a second shot, or more, then take it for certain that there's something amiss, and rouse up the anchor as fast as you can, and let the sloop drift off down the bay with the tide (only mind and keep her well off this side and the mud flats—you can

manage the rudder well enough for that) and the dingy'll be still towing alongside, you know—you mustn't get *it* aboard;—I'll push off down the side of the bay, and when I fire a shot a couple or three miles down, bring the dingy to me. If they miss the dingy, they'll never think the sloop's gone, and it's too dark and smoky for them to see; they'll only think the dingy's got adrift, and will strand somewhere down below by morning. If I make a bonfire, it won't be till I'm just coming away. Do just what I say. I'll answer for the rest."

"Stop!" he cried, as they were parting; "don't you set a sail; nor don't let it be set. Mind what I say. Make the fellow that's aboard steer: if he won't, with such a stream as there is, and the wind right across the bay, you can't help seeing which is the channel."

Once more they were moving off.

"Stop! stop!" he said again. "If you find the wind very strong on you (it's heavy and right abeam), hold against it a little—like this;" and he took hold of Rooney's arm and communicated to him the particular motion to give the rudder. "And if you *should* happen to get on one of the

flats—but you 're better men at this pinch of the game than that—blaze up the fire and show me where you are, and I'll hail you; and then be as smart as you can with the boat. It's your only chance for 'Timo,' Rooney: so look after it. Morgan, here lad; twenty miles out to sea for you, or Sydney gaol by to-morrow night. Soger—but you and I could *always* understand one another. Now, just straight forward, you know."

As, after a few minutes from this time, the Black stopped and listened within a few feet of the front verandah, he could hear only two voices. They were women's, conversing and pausing, and speaking again.

"Nay, bairn; have I not loved myself? And that cannot be wrong which all do and the holiest the most devoutly. I wish Reuben would come. I never heard him murmur in a dark dream of his sleep when he was a helpless child but I ran to awaken and comfort him. Alas—alas—alas! none are faithful to us but the God on high!"

"Oh! what shall I do? Margaret, will you have a little wine?"

A feeble chuckling laugh was the answer.

"Honie! kiss me, once more. Wine? bairn!"

—You think I am not myself. Once more, dearest child," she cried, as Mary kissed her, "once more — once more. And, because it is more blessed to give than to receive, and the last counsels of the just are of the nature of an immortal treasure, observe what I say,—If Willoughby returns, and you two become as one, all through your future life, let nothing make you forget him for an instant : if he return not, banish the thought and let nothing make you remember him. You cannot bear it ; and God has His own purposes, and they are greater than man's."

The Black could partly hear what was said—occasional words. As he was about to draw nearer, to look through the window, a wild, spirit-stirring tune came rolling up the waters below, but from some way down the bay. What could it be? Probably some settler's boat coming over from the other side to give a hand at the fire.

He could hear the cadences ; but he could not hear the song. That, even where it was merrily pealing forth, was half stifled by the wind.

"There's nothing half so pleasant
When the wild seas roar,
As a snug berth aboard,
But a double bed ashore."

"Come, you lay to your oar," shouted the coxswain to the half-boy, half-man, that sat next in front of him, "or you'll go overboard, and I'll take your oar myself; and you'll have to stop on the bank till we come back in the morning."

"The *Daisy* won't hurt, sir," said the youth, as he saw the coxswain stand up in the boat, and turned his own head and observed the blaze; but he added, "by jinks it's pretty close."

"You drop your chanting, then," said the coxswain; "you're throwing all the oars out of stroke. Next time you come with me on such a trip you won't have so much grog."

And once more, all six hands reduced to a common stroke, on shot the speedy dashing whaleboat up the bay.

The Black bethought himself that the time was going on, and the murmurings of women's voices, after all, were no more to him than a troubling of the air. He advanced and looked through the window.

"Oh!—Oh!—What is that?" shrieked Mary. "Oh, Margaret! there is some dreadful thing outside."

Margaret now seemed sleeping; her face was

the fixed, still face of a corpse ; but the placid rapture of the departing soul whose work is accomplished, giving its testimony to the yet unperfect, shone like a heavenly light into Mary's heart.

"Who are you?" she asked, as she rose and took the candlestick in her hand and advanced into the other room, and approached the window.

"It's only me, Miss," said the Black, as he opened the parlour door and took hold of her arm. "Don't be alarmed."

"What are you?" cried Mary. Then, as she looked at him again and saw his face, and fell on her knees, she said,—“Don't be cruel to me.”

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the Black, as he almost kicked her aside. Before the sound had well time to form itself on the ear, the quick, heavy footfalls of the old dog, who had some time before his entrance bounded off downwards to the bay, were heard, mingled with his heavy breathing, as he again entered the passage. The Black, who had kept his pistol all the while in his right hand, with a finger on the trigger, turned, and as the faithful animal stopped and couched back on his hind-quarters for a spring, fired. The charge had no room to spread, but

went bodily into his chest; and when the smoke rose away on the draft of the air, his old grisly form lay motionless on its side, save for a little moving of the limbs, and two or three convulsive tossings of the head.

After looking round the parlour, Beck went on to the bedroom. There he stood as if thunder-struck for an instant; for his clearly-defining mind saw what Mary had not seen—that it was actual death.

“Young lady,” he said, “I see the old woman is just dead. I won’t hurt you: but I must have some money.”

“Yes,” said Mary. And she went to the drawers of Margaret’s room and brought out her own little gay purse and Margaret’s.

“There’s more than this in the house,” said the Black. “This is your money and the old woman’s. Where does Reuben keep his? Oh, by the ——! I forgot.”

He took the candle and passed into the passage, and hastily all over the cottage, then looked out at the back door. But his glance, able as it was, could discern no materials for effectuating the bonfire he had intended.

"Sophy, or whatever your name is," he said, on re-entering the parlour, where Mary sat, panting, and sometimes moaning, and then checking herself and listening,—“will you give me the money?”

“You’ve got it.

“I mean Reuben’s.”

“He’s got none—he never keeps any here.”

“His watch.” It had been his father’s watch: and Mary knew it.

“His watch! Do you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you tell me, then?”

“Because I won’t.”

“You won’t? No! is that it? Pluck among the women! Ha! ha! ha! Will you turn it up?”

“No!”

“If you don’t, you’ll have to go with me. What do you say?”

The poor girl made no reply; but sat as she was.

“Will you give it to me?”

No answer.

“Then I’ll try whether I can make you.”

And he stepped forward, and lifting her hand far above her head with his left, grasped it in his right, and wrung it round. On to tiptoe she rose, to ease her wrist, and then screamed bitterly, and fell.

Instantly, outside, there was the sound of a piece going off, and the snapping of the glass of the window, and the Black sprang, as if bounding in some uncouth dance, and reeled, and fell.

As Mary struggled up from the dreaded contaminating touch, a face—Willoughby's own—white as if from the cerements of the grave, presented itself to her gaze, coming in at the door.

“Oh, Willoughby! not yet—not yet!” she shrieked. “I'll come—I'll come:—not now!” and, rushing into the other room, she cowered behind the dead, upon the utmost corner of the bed.

The young seaman stopped, and dropped the butt of his fowlingpiece on the floor, and had rammed down the powder, and was placing a ball in the muzzle, when a strong hand was laid on his shoulder, and shook him—

“Don't mangle the dying, Willoughby,” said

Reuben, pushing him aside, and stepping over the convulsed mass that was plunging about the floor, and making his way into Margaret's room.

"Mary—my own beautiful darling!" but she only screamed, and cowered behind the dead. Again he spoke as he bent over her; but she only reiterated her screams, and shrank down in more frantic terror: at last he was obliged to lift her by force. Then, when she felt who it was, she clung round his neck: but the words she kept hastily trying to utter to him, no one could understand.

"Willoughby! drag that accursed thing out: it will kill her if she sees it again. And she must go out into the air, or she'll die. Be alive!" he shouted, impatiently, as the struggling and rumbling of the chairs told how slowly it could be performed. But at last the noise came from the front verandah; and Reuben hastily carried out his sister to the back of the cottage, where, speechless, she continued to cling, in a sort of sullen terror, to his neck.

At the instance of his friend, Willoughby hastened back to his boat, and, rowing out to where the *Mary Kable* was likely to be at anchor, arrived

just in time to catch sight of her drifting, at some distance off, down the bay. The outlaws, mistaking Willoughby's shot for the Black's signal to them, had heaved up the anchor immediately they heard it. They, however, observed that they were chased by the six-oared whale-boat before it could overtake them, and, getting into the dingy, rowed away. In the darkness and smoke of the night, all trace of their fate was lost: henceforth it remained matter of mere conjecture. The *Mary Kable's* dingy was picked up next day by one of the little coasters, floating bottom upwards, several miles out at sea.

From its long-drawn experience, the world has delivered us a peevish apophthegm—"That it never rains, but it pours" with some people. As a truth, it is well enough; the application only is faulty. The dull and stolid require no culture of their fortitude: open to no passionate impulses, they need versing in no great self-control. But others, of more energetic temperament, in various degrees find their whole lives an alternation of vicissitudes; and, as families so much follow a common character, so, properly enough, it falls to them to share a common lot. By this

prompting experience only should we learn to labour for, and attain the "even mind," without which passion becomes madness, and power degenerates into violence.

That tendency even, which exists so widely, to blame with unmeasured severity those whose whole lives present but a single catalogue of misfortune, is an erroneous one,—as much erroneous as that other bias of common minds, to almost worship such as have become crowned with great success. Success is as often Heaven's exhilarant, distributed in compassion to the faint-hearted, as aught else: a stimulus, and an acknowledgment that they have done their best. The great and tireless spirits may have the spur given them, and rouse at its touch into loftier bursts of vigour, whilst the feebler would shrink beneath it, and give up the race. Indeed, all the dispensations of this world, to be looked at truly, must be considered in regard to the ultimate, not the past. We are not to forget that success and honour are the meed of courageous human toil: but far less must we fail to keep in mind how much in all things there is of a divine destiny. And that looks at the future. Whilst

men are not left cheerless, hopeless, aimless, by a neglect of the recognition of their toils in the *brief past*,—the grand, the never-lost-sight-of point is incitement to a heroic *eternity*.

Several days passed before any tidings could reach the Morrumbidgee respecting the fierce struggle so gravely, yet happily, concluded at Brisbane Water. The crisis once known, by the lapse of sufficient time, to be passed, all minds were silently, but progressively, schooling themselves to hear, with chastened joy or submissive lament, the announcement of the Will Supreme. Then came the heavenly token that its design was thus far fully accomplished upon their characters,—the best of tidings arrived in the most welcome of forms, giving in an hour a moral totality to years. They had gone through their struggle, they had learned their lesson of fortitude, all to the present utmost of their ability : and now came the reward.

As Marianna was now too much occupied with some one else to bestow much of her time on her friend, Rachael had not been over to the Rocky Springs for a couple of days ; when, as late in the afternoon she sat sewing in her little parlour,

two or three sharp raps resounded from the open leaf of the store-door, that opened against the wall at her back. As Mr. Oshee now rarely conducted any part of the business, except taking his wages, she rose at once, and went to see who it was. The visitant was, in one respect, such an one as she often saw—a toil-worn, bedusted horseman, young and vigorous, but seemingly almost too languid with the heat and over-exertion. When she came out he bowed; but though he cast his eyes round the store, they settled nowhere. After an instant she looked at him again; and now he was looking also steadfastly at her.

“You seem very tired indeed, sir,” said Rachael; “I’ll bring you a chair.”

“No, no!—never mind a chair, Rachael,” replied the stranger, in a rapid, energetic, familiar way; it seemed to her she was quite used to it, and yet could not be, for she had never seen the speaker before. “If *you’ll* give me half a glass of good brandy in a little water, Rachael,” continued the traveller, “*I’ll* drink it. Meantime I shall just sit down on these tea-chests in the draught of the door.”

Rachael hastened to provide the desired refreshment. The stranger's eyes seemed to indicate that he felt some singular interest in her, for they accompanied every motion. Rachael instinctively felt this, and hardly liked it: but there was something so perfectly manly, and so unsophisticated about her youthful customer (as she supposed he would be); he was really so evidently one of nature's noblesse, and, though so staid and weary, yet yielded such an impression of liability to be thrown into intensest activity by a single touch on any one of the great springs of the soul, that after all she only thought about being vexed, but did not feel so. Nevertheless, there was actual effect of some sort on her, for her hand which held the glass trembled considerably.

"Ah! well!" half said, half sighed the stranger, "I suppose I may as well — my dear Miss Rachael!" he cried, springing at a couple of strides to her side, and taking the glass from her hand—for she was suddenly trembling so violently that she could scarcely hold it—"are you ill?"

A single glance at the stranger's face, now illumined by feeling, made good what the first

unrestrained expression of his voice in that brief soliloquy had begun, and identified him, beyond all doubt, with one who, whatever *she* might be to *him*, was far from being a stranger to her.

“My *dear* Miss Moses,” said the brother of her friend, with all her friend’s own pointed and tender emphasis, “I am so sorry I have startled you. I had no notion—that—though you have been so kind and faithful to my relatives, that you cared so much about them and theirs.”

Rachael’s heart was as simple as a child’s; and the evasive conclusion of the sentence led her to believe for an instant that he had not penetrated her feelings : but the very first glance dispelled the illusion. It was Marianna’s keen searching eye from a higher position; and she felt at once helpless in Charles Bracton’s hands. But it was a noble foe she had to deal with.

“You have been to them, Rachael, as kind and good as I have been unprofitable. It is I who ought to blush, Rachael, not you. For my own part I can only say, that I never longed for anything in my life so much as to see you; or ever so felt how much too little I had longed when my wish came to pass, as I do now.”

Re-assured by the unhesitating acknowledgment, Rachael invited her guest to enter and rest himself.

“No,” he said; “I am afraid that hereafter you will think me coming too often: but this afternoon I must hurry on. I am, at present, Willoughby’s messenger. I heard of his ship getting into Sydney Cove just before ours, and sought him. He was just about to send a messenger. Mr. Kable, of Broken Bay (I think they call it), and Willoughby, have, it appears, settled this gang of bushrangers between them: but not without a severe fright to Miss Kable. Here’s a letter for Kate. I suppose you can guess who it’s from?”

But after they had shaken hands and mutually said farewell, and Charles was even partly beyond the door, he stopped, turned, paused, thought and seemed to come to the conclusion that still there was something more required by the circumstances from him. Advancing toward Rachael again, he said:—

“Don’t suppose, Rachael, that I am such a dolt as not to know and feel, too, that there is a beauty of the soul, and a delight in the contem-

plation of it infinitely beyond all else:—the noblest woman can degrade herself into hideousness, and the plainest hide her plainness in the most transcendant grace, by the beauty or the deformity of her acts. But when the spiritual and the sensible are both found in the one—*can* one do any otherwise than adore her?”

And as Charles once more uttered, with all his sister's clear expression, his thoughts, he drew forth and displayed to the astonished sight of Rachael, a miniature of herself exquisitely painted.

“Now, don't be angry with Marianna about it,” he said. “It came just in time to enable me to fight the battle of that long, terrible suspense! Oh, Rachael; if it hadn't been for you!—what should I have been?”

Another hour, and there was joy such as there had never been before at the Rocky Springs. At the urgent demand of more stirring events we have had to pass over the minor ones. Funds to an amount far beyond what the occasion demanded, were now at Mr. Bracton's service; and Willoughby, informed by Reuben Kable of the state of affairs, had promptly applied them.

Before Willoughby left Brisbane Water, the "Daisy" had recovered, and slept a little, and was become quite herself again.—So mighty are the powers of life in the warm breast of youth.

Months have rolled on. The Black and his victim lie buried in distant graves. The fate of the three outlaws who escaped, as already stated, remains testified by no other sign than the state and situation in which their boat was found. Mr. and Mrs. Simons are in charge of the tap-room plate at a house of entertainment, a good way off from the Royal Hotel. Grimsby has become a better police officer in the exact proportion that he has become a worse customer at the public house. Mr. Peter Burnes has transferred his license, at the unanimous request of the magistrates. Dubbo is a square man. And John Thomas and Biddy are now man and wife. The Considerate Man approves of it all fully:—"It's just that there very thing what might have been suspected all along."

As to the superior parties:—Katharine and Mary are next-door neighbours at the Bay: when they can make up their minds to part, of which, however, there seems no great like-

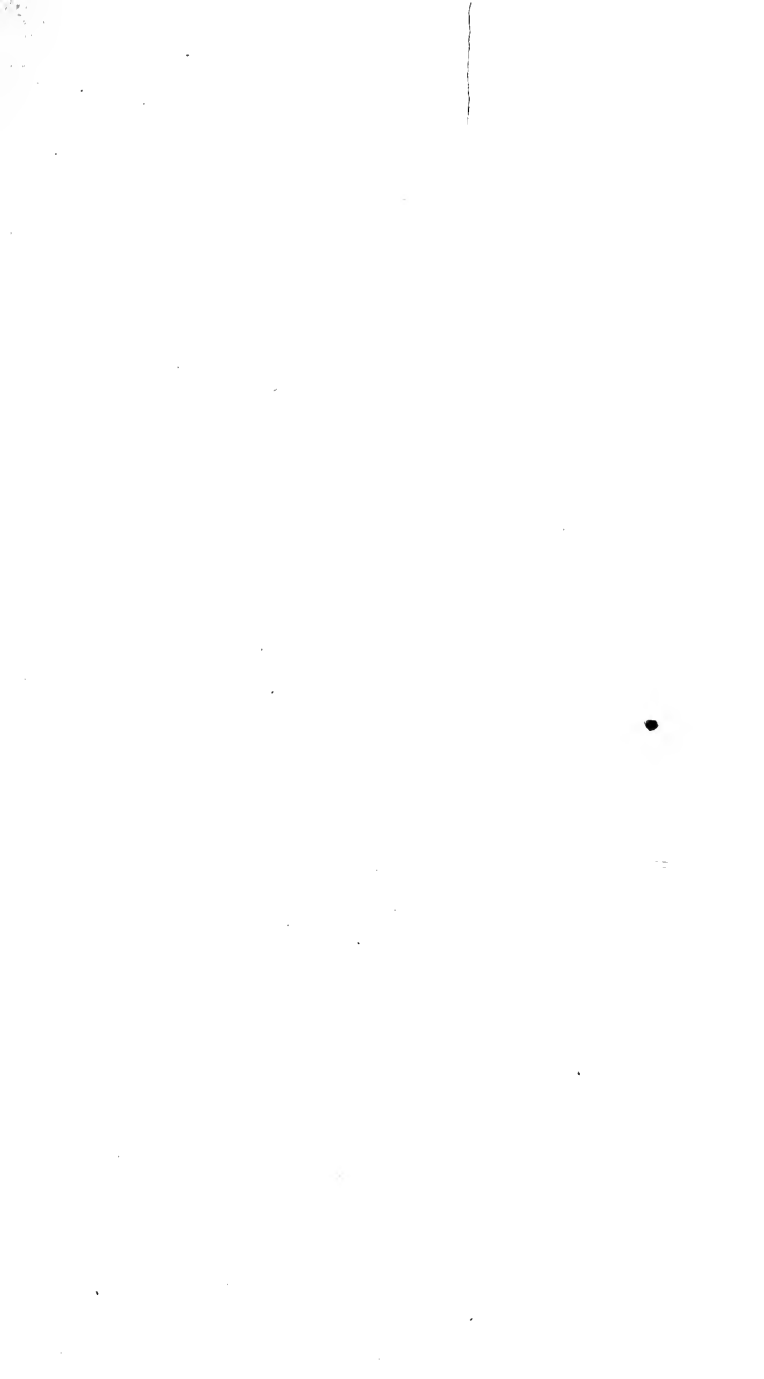
lihood at an early date, Reuben will leave the whole of the ground there to his sister, and begin afresh up the country ; or, perhaps, migrate to some other part of the immense island. Meantime, he and Willoughby go on much as when they first became acquainted ; for Willoughby has very properly concluded—as first shewn, however, by the Daisy—that it is better to have a wife and plenty to live on, than lose wife, and self, and all, in trying to get too much. Marianna is to have the Rocky Springs eventually : but the Old Tar and his helpmate seem to have taken so unequivocally a fresh lease of life, since Charles came out, and all began to go prosperously under sedulous guidance, that the whole family concur in finding that it would be absurd for Marianna to think of waiting till she could install Mr. Hurley into shepherding his own sheep *there*. Consequently, for the present, she is Mrs. Hurley, junior, assisting Mrs. Hurley, senior, to cheer the young magistrate on through the toils of his duties. Finally, Mr. Charles Bracton seems in great danger of being thrown on the alternatives of what the old gentleman can give him alone, or that, together with Rachael

and from six to seven thousand pounds. Rachael says that, after making a careful calculation, she finds she is *not worth quite the latter sum*. But the young surgeon laughs at her ; and tells her she is *worth a hundred thousand times more than that*.

THE END.







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